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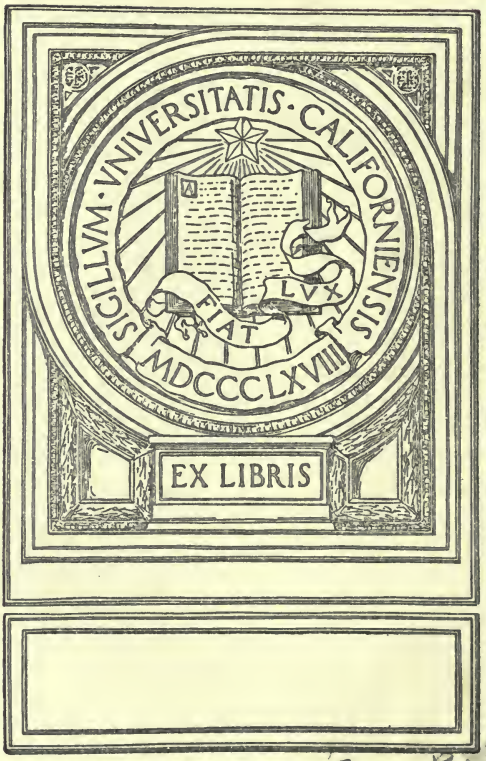

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The O'Donaghoughs bait their trap.

THE

WIDOW MARRIED;

A SEQUEL TO

"THE WIDOW BARNABY."

BY

FRANCES TROLLOPE,

AUTHORESS OF

"MICHAEL ARMSTRONG," "THE VICAR OF WREXHILL,"

&c. &c.

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THE WIDOW MARRIED.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION CAREFULLY OBTAINED, AND PROMPTLY ACTED UPON—A GREAT CHANGE TAKES PLACE, TO ALL OUTWARD APPEARANCE, IN THE FORTUNES OF THE O'DONAGOUGH FAMILY—MR. O'DONAGOUGH FEELS THIS AND CONFESSES IT—HAPPY PROGNOSTICATIONS.

This adventure made a considerable change in the proceedings of Mr. O'Donagough. A very few inquiries sufficed to assure him that Sir Henry Seymour was a young man of large and unencumbered estate, with the accumulated product of fifteen years minority just placed at his own disposal. That he was, moreover, of a gay and pleasure-loving temperament, and conceived to be exceedingly liberal in his expenditure, and generous in

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disposition. It was not likely that a man of Mr. O'Donagough's discernment could be insensible to the value of such a character, or in the least degree indifferent to the probable advantages it might bring to all who were fortunate enough to fall into intimate connexion with it. Neither was there any danger that he should undervalue the degree of influence which his knowledge of the young man's private affairs was likely to give him. With all this working strongly together in his brain, he soon came to the conclusion that no half measures could suit the present position of his affairs; and without confessing, even to the wife of his bosom, that he had greatly changed his immediate plans, he set about looking for a house in good earnest, and determined that it should be such a one as should aid all the bold projects he had in view.

Had he deemed it "wisest, best," Mr. O'Donagough was not without the means of furnishing a splendid mansion in very showy style, and yet not leaving a single morsel of lacker, or *or-molu*, unpaid for. But he was far too

clever a man to risk on any speculation a single sixpence more than was needful to give it a fair chance of success; and he therefore decided upon selecting a ready-furnished house as the scene of his first attempt on a large scale, in London. Should it fail, should vexatious accidents of any kind arise to cut short his career, the loss might be easily calculated, and a retreat easily effected.

His resolution once taken, he lost no time in putting it into execution. An extremely gay-looking residence in Curzon-street, in the rent of which the proprietor was disposed to make some sacrifice, for the sake of letting it for a year, and at an unfavourable season, fixed him at once; he agreed, without difficulty, to pay the rent in advance; and exactly one week from the day on which he had been let into the confidence of Sir Henry Seymour, he informed his wife and daughter that he had secured for their use, for the year next ensuing, an elegant mansion in one of the most fashionable streets in London.

The effect of this news upon Mrs. O'Dona-

gough was very like that of intoxication; only that the symptoms continued to show themselves for weeks, instead of hours. At first she began to talk with exceeding rapidity, seemingly indifferent whether any one listened to her or not. Then she laughed, much and often, having no obvious cause for it whatever; and then she would sit in strange abstractedness, with a look that might have been mistaken for a sign of headach, or approaching somnolency, but which in truth betokened the very reverse; being rather an evidence of faculties particularly awake, and intent on very high and mighty objects.

Patty was altogether in a state of mind and spirits which rendered the fine house of small comparative importance, though had she at any moment been told that

There 's no such thing,

it is probable, to use her own phraseology, that she would have "cried her eyes out." But so predominant were the ideas that she was certainly going to have Jack for a husband, and to be called "my lady," that no subjects

of lesser interest could long retain possession of her memory.

The friendship of the two Miss Perkinses was at this time invaluable, and so thoroughly aware did Mrs. O'Donagough become of the absolute necessity of having some one on whom she could discharge her thoughts, that she induced her husband to abandon entirely his visionary friends at Richmond, and confess that he found it was quite necessary they should remain in their "little bit of a lodging," till their "own house," was ready for them. This obviated all difficulties, and the excellent Miss Perkinses trotted daily from Brompton to the bit of a lodging, and from the bit of a lodging to Curzon-street, with a resolute perseverance that nothing but the most devoted friendship could have inspired.

"Beautiful rooms! ain't they, Louisa? Isn't the third drawing-room a perfect paradise, Matilda? What a place for flirting, girls! That sofa in the recess is the prettiest thing I ever saw in my life," said Mrs. O'Donagough, for the twenty-seventh time, as her two friends

and her daughter roamed about the house, from garret to cellar, on the third day after it was taken. "How I do wish they would get these tiresome beds put up! Isn't it too hard to have such a house as this, and not be able to get into it?—Donny! Donny! Where in the world is your father got to, Patty? He *never* is in the right place.—By the by, dears, I must leave off calling him Donny, musn't I? It will never do in such a drawing-room as this. To be sure it is quite unaccountable how one does get into foolish, vulgar ways, sometimes, and it's a proof, is'nt it, that one always ought to keep oneself up, even if one sees nobody nor nothing? However, there is no great danger of my not getting out of it again—my first recollections are of the most refined kind. This is a charming house, to be sure, but no more to be compared to Silverton-park than chalk to cheese. I shall like to see our friends the officers here, Matilda; won't it be nice?"

These words instantly brought the lady she addressed to her side; for though till that moment she had been entirely engrossed by

her friend, the future Lady Seymour, there was in them a charm, powerful as magic, to which the endearing "I say, Matilda!" of her young friend was, in comparison, but idle breath.

"Dearest Mrs. O'Donagough!" returned the fluttered and flattered young lady, gliding across the room to her, with a movement not unlike that of a figure cut in paper and blown across a table by the artificer,—"dearest Mrs. O'Donagough! How I long to see you installed with all your proper style and state about you, and receiving company in your own elegant and graceful way. To be sure there never was any one so perfectly made by nature, as one may say, to give parties as you are! Your manners, your kindness, your person, your very style of dress, all seemed formed on purpose for it. I am sure it is a blessing, and an honour, and a happiness to know you!"

"Well, well, 'Tilda, we shall see, we shall see. By the by, I'll tell you what I shall like as well as anything in the whole job; and that is, making my old ramshorn aunt Betsy come

to see me here. Won't I make her remember the bees and the bread-and-milk?"

Notwithstanding all the eager attention with which Miss Matilda looked up into her face, most sincerely wishing to understand every word she uttered, there was a mystery in this allusion which defied her sagacity, stretched, as it was, to the very utmost; and she could only reply by laying her hand with a fond squeeze on the plump arm of her magnificent friend, and repeating, with a little coaxing laugh, "Dearest Mrs. O'Donagough!"

"But that's neither here nor there, resumed the great lady, recollecting herself. "I was thinking of bygone times when that crabbed old soul was a perfect tyrant to me. I don't mean, of course, that she was not always living in very high style, as a person of her noble birth, and immense possessions ought to do; but you know, my dear, many old people, both rich and poor, like nothing so well as tormenting young ones, and what I said about the bees and bread-and-milk, came from recollecting the time when she kept bees for her own amuse-

ment in some most elegant golden hives, and then, instead of letting me look at them, ordered the footman to take me to the housekeeper, or the lady's-maid, I'm sure I forget which, to eat bread-and-milk for supper. So spiteful of her! wasn't it, Matilda?"

"Spiteful indeed! dearest Mrs. O'Donagough! I cannot conceive how any human being could ever have the heart to be otherwise than kind and affectionate, and, in fact, altogether doting upon you!" replied Miss Matilda. "I don't suppose there ever was a person," she continued, "so made in every way to be liked and loved as you are. I am sure, Louisa and I sit by the hour together, and have done, ever since we first knew you, talking of nothing in the world but your particular manner of being delightful to every body. Poor dear Louisa, you know, is very shy, but she declares that in your company she forgets it entirely, and feels as easy and as happy, almost, as if she was quite by herself."

"I am very glad to make Louisa happy, and

you too, my dear," replied Mrs. O'Donagough, swelling a little, as she was wont to do, when called upon to assert her dignity; but, to tell you the real truth, my dear Miss Matilda Perkins, I shall feel that I owe it to myself, when I get into this house, and to my family also, to keep up with most people that sort of dignity and reserve which my station requires. I can assure you that Silverton-park, when I was quite a newly-married and very young woman, though it was celebrated through all the west of England as a scene of the most delightful hospitality, never witnessed the slightest attempt at undue familiarity from any of its innumerable guests towards me."

As this was uttered with appropriate accent and attitude, the soul of the gentle Matilda seemed to die within her as she listened to it. But Mrs. O'Donagough on perceiving the effect she had produced, felt satisfied that she might again relax a little with safety, and immediately added,

"But you and your sister are particular friends, you know, and I shall never insist

upon any alteration in your manners when we are quite by ourselves. When there are strangers present, of course you will understand that there should be a difference."

"What *do* you stay prosing there for, Matilda?" cried Patty at this moment, turning from an unprofitable examination of the empty street. "Come here, can't you? you know I have got lots of things to say, and you may just as well leave mama alone—Louisa will do for her to count over the chairs and tables with."

"What a madcap!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Donagough, with a graceful air of elegant indulgence. "Go to her, my dear, and send your sister Louisa to me. She is quite lost, poor thing, in the delight of walking about these pretty rooms—for after all, I can't say I consider them as any thing more than merely pretty. However, they will do very well till that wild girl of mine is sobered down into a woman of fashion, and a wife. And then I flatter myself that Mr. Allen O'Donagough will think it right and proper to take me into

a square to live. This house is all very well for a street; but I very much doubt if Sir Henry—get along, Matilda," added the tender mother, pointing to the frowning beauty, who stood impatiently waiting for her listener while this harangue went on. "Go on to her dear, and tell her she must never let Sir Henry see such a face as that!"

Miss Matilda, who had stood between the mother and daughter during Mrs. O'Donagough's last speech, like a bit of rubbish on the wave of a retreating tide, seemingly returning from time to time, but really becoming more distant at every movement, joyfully accepted this dismission, and ere another moment had passed, was enjoying herself in the balcony of the front room, with Patty once more hanging upon her arm.

"How can you be such a fool Matilda, as to stand listening for an hour together to mama's humdrums?" said the young lady, judiciously placing herself and her friend as much out of sight of those within the windows, as the premises would allow. "A child of

five years old could manage better than you do!"

"Upon my word, Patty, you are out there," replied her friend; "it is from no want of wit or will either, on my part, if I leave you for a moment; for, goodness knows, I had rather be talking with you than anything else in the world—excepting, you know, when you happen to be engaged in another way; or," she added after a pause, and with a deep sigh,—"or if poor Foxcroft was even again to steal into my heart with his delicious converse."

"Oh, for that matter, I never want to spoil sport, any more than you do, Matilda. We are both of us good-natured girls in that way. 'Do as you would be done by,' that is our motto, isn't it? But I have no notion of your leaving me, with my finger in my eye, because I have got no one to speak to, while you stand palavering with mama," said Miss O'Donagough.

"But I must, Patty, if it is her will and pleasure, you know. I can tell you, if you don't know it already, that your mama expects

a great deal more attention and ceremony, and all that sort of thing now, a great deal more indeed than she did at Brighton. In short, she says so herself, openly and plainly; and I see as plain as daylight, that if I am not very attentive and respectful, all the fat will be in the fire, and what will become then of all the happiness we expect together?" returned her friend.

"Once for all, Matilda, I'll tell you plainly, that you had better mind your hits between mama and me. I won't bear to be neglected for any one; and if you don't choose to be my particular friend, and stand by me, through thick and thin, without caring a pin for anybody else, somebody else shall, that's all. I have no notion of mama setting herself up, for no other reason in the world than just because my Jack happens to be a Sir. And who has the best right to set themselves up because of that, I wonder? So you will just please to take your choice, Miss Matilda."

"Oh! my darling, only, Patty!" returned the terrified favourite, in an accent which

seemed to predict a shower of tears; "how can you speak so cruelly? Do you not know how I dote upon you? Don't you know, that excepting my poor dear Foxcroft, to whom I am determined to be as faithful as you have been to your Jack, don't you know that excepting him, there is no living creature in the whole wide world, that I love and dote upon as I do you."

"Very well then—don't let us say any more about it; but tell me, Matilda, what do you think I ought to say the first time my beautiful sweetheart asks me downright to marry him?"

"Say, my dearest creature? Why, just at the *very* first, I suppose you must say that you are too young to think of such a thing."

"But, suppose he should take me at my word, Matilda? Suppose he should really go away again, for Heaven knows how long, just as he did when he went to Sheerness, you know? What would become of me then?"

"Oh, you must take care of that, dearest! you must take care that he does not out-and-out suppose you are quite in earnest. Common

sense teaches one, you know, when one says anything of that kind, to do it with a sort of look, or a hesitation, or something or other that shall make a man understand, if he is not a very great fool indeed, that you don't mean to kill him with cruelty."

"Well then, that will be got over without danger, for my Sir Henry Jack is no fool, I promise you," replied Patty, exultingly. "But I say, Matilda, how long do you think it will be before we shall be all right and ready to invite him?"

"Quite directly, I should think, as soon as you have got into the house, I mean," replied her patient friend, who had listened to the same question, and made the same answer about a hundred and fifty times since the Curzon Street house had been taken.

Meanwhile Mr. O'Donagough, who, in his own way, and in a less demonstrative manner, was quite as desirous of getting things *en train* as either Patty or her mother, did an immense deal of business in a wonderfully short space of time, and performed it all with as much skill as despatch.

It would not be easy to paint Mrs. O'Donagough's ecstasy, when she found that her generous husband intended she should possess both a very tall footman, and a very little tiger. It was, as she told Miss Louisa Perkins, a proof of such lover-like attention, as she never could forget.

"Such a multitude of people, you know, my dear, are absolutely *obliged* to do with only one or the other, that I feel very greatly touched, I must confess, by his so positively insisting that I should have both. Oh, my dear Louisa, how heartily I wish that you and poor Matilda, too, had exactly such a husband as Mr. O'Donagough! You have no idea—I am quite sure it is impossible that you should have any idea—how excessively kind he is to me!"

"Good Miss Louisa fancied she had remembered a few little scenes not quite accordant with this testimony; but she was far too obliging a person to remind Mrs. O'Donagough, at this happy moment, of circumstances which had occurred at one less so, and therefore only

replied by uttering a sigh, in a sort of coaxing cadence long drawn out, which might be written thus: Ough—ugh—gh!

"Poor things!" muttered Mrs. O'Donagough, as she bustled off to receive and examine a dingy-looking woman, who came as a candidate for the honour of being her cook, and who, like all others, desirous of a place in her household, presented herself at a given hour in the grand drawing-room of Curzon Street. "Poor things! what a shocking misfortune it is, to be sure, not getting a husband at all! Yet! bless me! so thin as they are, and with such light little eyes, what could they expect?"

At length the important day arrived, that was to convert Mr. O'Donagough from a *lodger*, into a *householder;* a transition which, from his lively recollection of past events, amused, as much as delighted him. The footman, the tiger, the cook, and the housemaid, were all made aware that though "the family" had been constantly coming to town to look after the house, they were, nevertheless, resident at Richmond. This was a sort of fact,

which Mr. O'Donagough himself was particularly anxious to establish, knowing, as he sometimes hinted to his wife, the *real* value of appearances, a good deal better than she did. He therefore arranged the ceremony of their *entrée* into their mansion in the following manner:—Mrs. O'Donagough and Patty having been despatched by an early coach to an hotel at Richmond, the husband and the father superintended the removal of all trunks, boxes, bundles, and baskets, by a cart from "the lodgings" to "the house," and then mounting into an omnibus, he rejoined the ladies, indulged them very liberally with sandwiches, cheesecakes, and porter, and then handed them into a postchaise, which four horses drew at full gallop, to the inexpressible delight of Patty, to the mansion in Curzon Street, where they were received by the footman, the tiger, the housemaid, and the cook, in a style which caused emotions in the breast of Mrs. O'Donagough more easily imagined than described.

A well-spread tea-table awaited them; and it was then and there, that Mr. O'Donagough

thought fit to enter more at length, than he had yet done, into a statement of what he wished and expected from the two ladies under the novel circumstances in which they were now placed. The conversation was, however, opened by his lady.

"Well, my Patty!" she exclaimed, contriving by a skilful movement of her impressive person to bring her luxurious arm-chair a little nearer to the fire. "Isn't this glorious?"

"I should like it better if there was more company," replied her candid daughter.

"That is very natural, my dear," observed her father, gravely: "but it is not civil to say so. And now we are on the chapter of manners, it is just as well to tell you both at once, that I must desire and insist that you are very careful on that point. 'Manners make the man,' you know, and they make the woman too, I promise you, quite as much as fine eyes, and a fresh complexion. You must both of you be exceedingly careful to be always lady-like and perfectly genteel in everything you say and do."

Mrs. O'Donagough became exceedingly red in the face while this was said. Not Mrs. Malaprop when her "parts of speech" were attacked, could feel more indignant than she did at this insinuation respecting the perfection of her manners.

"This *is* something new!" she exclaimed, while her expansive bosom heaved almost convulsively; "this *is* breaking out in a new place, Mr. O'Donagough, I must say. And pray what are you going to put into my daughter's head next? If my manners are not good enough to be a model for her, I should like very much to know where she is to find one. From my very earliest childhood, my manners have been remarked, and it is not for me to repeat what has been said of them. But this I *will* say, that I believe you are the first that ever found out there was anything in my manners to be mended."

"Upon my honour, my dear, I did not mean to say anything at all affronting about your manners. Of course I admire them extremely!" replied Mr. O'Donagough. "But Patty is

very young, you know, as yet, and therefore I think it is as well to give her a hint that she must be careful not to be too frolicsome and rampagous if she intends to be my Lady Seymour. The young man, you see, is a good deal with Mrs. Hubert, and that set, and I'll bet you what you will, that though he may be in love with our Patty, owing to their old acquaintance on board ship, which is quite natural, so handsome and affectionate as she is, yet still, I'll venture a good bet, he'd say, if he was asked, that Mrs. Hubert's manners, and her daughters, too, were exactly what is thought most elegant by people of high fashion; and that's what you must try to appear, if you can, you know."

Scarcely were these dangerous words uttered, ere he was assailed by both wife and daughter, who in the same instant burst upon him, each trying, as it seemed, to outscream the other.

"You don't mean to say," vociferated the elder lady, "that any living being in their senses could give the preference to the cold, starched, hateful, old-maidish manners of

Agnes Willoughby over mine? MINE! Gracious Heaven! That I should ever live to hear you say such a thing as that, Major—Mr. I mean—Mr. Allen O'Donagough! I should like to hear Lord Mucklebury's opinion on the point."

While these words were being uttered on one side of him, a shrill, young voice assailed him on the other with, "You think Jack would like Miss Longshanks Elizabeth better than me, do you? Well then, let him take her—that's all I have got to say about it."

"Wheugh!" whistled Mr. O'Donagough, extending his hands, as if to drive away a swarm of stinging flies, "what a racket you do make, ladies, about nothing at all. You don't quite catch my meaning, I perceive; but perhaps, by degrees, I may be able to make you understand me better. However, we will say no more about it now, if you please.—And, by the by, my Barnaby, there is something else to talk of, which I dare say you will think more agreeable. You have mentioned Lord Mucklebury; and do you know, my dear,

I should like exceedingly to find him out, that you might renew your acquaintance, and introduce me to him. I will promise not to be jealous, and I rather think he is one of the sort of people I should like to know."

There was in this speech wherewithal to heal very satisfactorily all the wounds inflicted by the former one. The conversation immediately flowed into a most agreeable channel, wherein a future of very great and hopeful splendour was sketched. Patty, indeed, fell asleep in the midst of it, which was probably owing to some rather business-like details which entered into the discussion; but scarcely ever had the *ci-devant* Major and his Barnaby passed an evening in more perfect harmony.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. FOXCROFT RE-APPEARS, AND BECOMES EXPLICIT—THE RESULT ARISING FROM THIS IS TO BE SHEWN HEREAFTER —PATTY GIVES PROOF OF A FINELY SYMPATHETIC DISPOSITION.

It so happened that the first visitor introduced into Mrs. O'Donagough's new drawing-room, by the intervention of the tall footman and the little page, was Mr. Foxcroft.

This gentleman, in consequence of having some still unsettled business to transact with Mr. O'Donagough, had kept up sufficient correspondence with him, to make him acquainted with his address; but it had not, as it seemed, been of so confidential a nature, as to include any description of his present abode, or manner of living. It was, therefore, with very undisguised astonishment, that this Brighton friend

looked round him upon all the finery and all the grandeur which Mrs. O'Donagough, her daughter, her servants, and her drawing-rooms presented to his view.

Some people might perhaps have thought this exceedingly uncivil, but Mrs. O'Donagough was not one of them; and the delight with which she witnessed his surprise, was as little concealed on her part, as the surprise itself was on his.

"How d'ye do, Captain Foxcroft? ha! ha! ha! How you do stare about you!" cried Mrs. O'Donagough, very cordially extending her hand. "Why, don't you know Patty again? I declare that's too bad, as if you never saw her elegantly dressed at Brighton."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, my dear Miss Patty!" exclaimed the visitor, striding across the floor, and shaking and pressing the young lady's hand with very affectionate vehemence, "for goodness sake do not suppose I did not know you! I am sure if I had seen you sitting upon a throne, I could never for a moment have mistaken your charming face for any other in the whole world;—only I had no idea, certainly, that your London residence was so completely elegant."

"Isn't that capital, Patty?" said Mrs. O'Donagough, with another hearty laugh. "Just look here, Foxcroft," she added, majestically leading the way to the second, and then to the third drawing-room. "I think on the whole this room is quite perfect—because of the recess, you see, and the elegant drapery about it. Isn't that a beautiful looking-glass? Of course you observe that all the chimneys have looking-glasses. That's a great advantage. There are a monstrous number of houses, and very elegant ones too, where there is but one, but nobody can tell that hasn't observed it, what an extraordinary great difference it makes. To be sure, Mr. O'Donagough is a man of the very best of tastes,—and I must say, as liberal as he is elegant. Sit down, Captain Foxcroft, sit down upon the sofa; we don't at all mind using the sofas, though they are, certainly, excessively beautiful.—But what good is there in having beautiful things if one's afraid to use them? Nothing I think shews a greater vulgarity, than that sort of carefulness, particularly in a house that one hires furnished.—Heaven knows we pay enough for it!"

"Of course, ma'am," replied the gentleman, "nobody can doubt that, and a delightful thing

it is, to be able to do things in such a style. I hope Mr. O'Donagough is well? I took the liberty of asking for him, and the servant said he was at home. There is a little business that I want to speak to him about, if he is quite at leisure."

"I believe he is in the library, Captain Foxcroft," replied Mrs. O'Donagough with much dignity. "Ring the bell, Patty. I will send the page to inform him that you are here."

When Mrs. O'Donagough from any accidental circumstance, or for any particular reason of her own, felt herself exalted higher in the scale of created beings than ordinary, her voice underwent a singular change, not easy to be described. It was as if some unusual fulness had arisen in her throat, which, while it obliged her to place her head in a particular position, and to add a third tier to the redundancy of her exuberant chin, appeared to elongate every word she uttered, and to give a sort of swelled and preternatural roundness to every syllable. "Oy cawn vainthure to asshurre y-you, Cawptin Fawxcroft," she said, as soon as she had given the message to the little priggish button-bedecked boy who answered the bell, "Oy cawn vainthure, I awm certawin, to asshurre y-you, that

eef Mr. O'Donagough is not veery partiqularly engaaged, he will not refewse to receeeve you."

Poor Mr. Foxcroft, who was come upon some rather awkward business, felt this sublimity to his fingers'-ends, and rather to escape from the danger of being overwhelmed by any more of it, than from any wish at that moment of enjoying the playful vivacity of Miss Patty, he suddenly rose and crossed the room to where, as usual, she was lounging upon a couch placed close against the window, and looking into the street.

"I hope you have not forgotten an old friend, Miss Patty, because you have got into a new house?" said he.

"No, that I havn't, Captain Foxcroft," replied Miss Patty, well pleased, as it seemed, by this address; "I was only waiting to see how long it would be before you would have done palavering with mama. None of your old friends forget you, I can tell you that."

Delighted at finding that one, at least, of the family remained much in the same state of refinement as heretofore, Mr. Foxcroft expressed very warmly his gratitude for the consolatory assurance, adding, "I need hardly tell you, my dear Miss Patty, that there is no change on my part."

"So far so good," replied Patty, with very friendly exultation, "and I suppose I may repeat that, mayn't I, wherever I like?"

"To be sure you may, my dear Miss Patty!" he rejoined with an air of sudden intelligence; for in fact, he at that moment recollected, for the first time since he entered the fine drawing-room, that *one* of his lady-loves was, or had been, the elected *amie de la maison.* To say the truth, Mr. Foxcroft's personal concerns had occupied him of late so exclusively, that the remembrance of the fair Matilda had melted from his recollection altogether; and not till the marked emphasis which Patty placed on the word "wherever," set him to meditate on her meaning, did her idea recur to him. Then, however, "a sudden thought struck him," that it might be worth while, under existing circumstances, to renew the acquaintance. A good footing at the house of Mr. O'Donagough was essential to him, and it mattered little how it was obtained. Female influence was always powerful, and, moreover, it was not quite impossible that he might find upon inquiry, even stronger reasons still for renewing his tender intercourse with the susceptible Matilda. As these thoughts passed rapidly through his head,

his eyes became animated, and expressed that sort of second-hand tenderness, with which gentlemen of his tone and manner, are apt to address the young-lady confidantes of their beloveds.

"How excessively kind it is of you to take so much interest in me, Miss Patty!" he said, hanging his head a little on one side, and pressing his hands fervently together; "I am sure your eyes can read my heart, and you are quite at liberty to repeat what you find there to—— to those, you know, who are in your confidence."

"Well! that's fair and open, any way," replied Patty, "she shall know what you say, trust me for that."

At this moment the page returned with his master's compliments, and "he would be happy to see the gentleman in the library." Giving a look of confidential intelligence to Patty, and a bow of prodigious respect to Mrs. O'Donagough, Mr. Foxcroft followed the page, who ushered him into a back parlour, large enough to have been called a library had there been books in it, but of these the show was so scanty, as almost to escape a cursory observation. However, there were not wanting any

of the various other articles, which in the minds of many as essentially constitute a gentleman's library, as the books themselves. Thus, there was an oblong table with drawers at its sides, and covered with leather, on which was spread abundance of manly litter, among which might be found pen, ink, and paper. On another table were several newspapers, together with a boot-hook and a shoeing-horn. There were, moreover, among "the fixtures," two large cases, probably designed to accommodate such "silent friends" as the owner might choose to invite; but as yet, none such had arrived at Mr. O'Donagough's bidding, and the glass doors sheltered nothing more erudite than Mr. O'Donagough's wardrobe, he having happily agreed in opinion with his lady, that he would find it very comfortable and convenient to make the library his dressing room. Notwithstanding the want of books, however, Mr. O'Donagough was reading, and this, together with the literary-leisure air communicated by a printed calico dressing-gown, made him feel that to all intents and purposes he was receiving his friend in his library. But though surrounded thus by dignity and ease, he condescended to rise, throw away the Sporting

Magazine with which he was engaged, and hold out a hand to his friend.

"Oh! Foxcroft! I'm glad to see you, my good fellow. How did you manage to get leave? But you are too soon, now, by a month or two. There's no great business doing yet," said Mr. O'Donagough.

Mr. Foxcroft shook his head, and his face, naturally of rather lengthy proportions, grew longer still.

"Why what the devil's the matter!" resumed the master of the library; "you look as doleful as if you had been in the pillory."

"It's all up with me, O'Donagough!" replied the guest; "I have been sent to the right about. But privately, observe. I was told that I had better sell out. So there are but two men in the regiment, Dashmore and Willis, of course, that know anything about it. This is better than if it was blown, but yet it is a cursed business, and I want you to give me your advice, as to what I had best do to help myself."

"Upon my word, Mr. Foxcroft," replied the prosperous Mr. O'Donagough very gravely, "it is by no means in my power to say. I was in hopes you were come to settle your little

account with me, which certainly would be convenient at this moment, from the immense sums I have had to pay for getting into this house, furnished as it is. You have been in the drawing-room, I believe; I need hardly tell you that it has sucked up a tolerable lot of ready money."

"Of course it has," replied the melancholy-looking ex-lieutenant, "and one great reason for my coming to you was, to consult what I could do in order to get the means of paying you. As a man of honour, O'Donagough, you must be aware that my debt to you is what lies heaviest upon my mind, and that, if you will give me a helping hand, the paying you will be my first object."

"No doubt of it, no doubt of it," replied Mr. O'Donagough, "because, of course, I need not tell that if that is not attended to, all's up. You and I have lived long enough to understand that, you know. But as to coming to me, and asking me, in this way, what you are to do, I must say it looks rather wild and scrambling, Mr. Foxcroft, and not very promising for your debts of honour, certainly."

"I am ready to do anything, O'Donagough!

But Heaven knows at this moment I know not where to turn for a pound."

"And upon my soul, sir, I don't know where to send you for one. There must have been some great imprudence, Mr. Foxcroft—some extremely awkward management, I am afraid, to have produced so very sudden a catastrophe; not but what I always thought it would be better for you to leave the regiment. Excepting just your own set, the men about you were the last in the world for you to get amongst. The fact is, that generally speaking, the English army is not a profession to be carried on with—with any other. But then I always reckoned upon your selling out, sir, in a way which would have put you in funds to settle with your friends—I can't say that I had any idea you would manage matters so clumsily as you have done."

"For pity's sake don't reproach me, O'Donagough! And, upon my honour, I don't deserve it, either; for it was a mere accident, and no blunder of mine whatever. It was a note that I sent by an orderly, and the rascal took it wrong."

"A note! Why you are not such a fool as to write down at full length in the morning,

what you have been doing over-night, I suppose?"

"Not exactly. But the note was to Dashmore, and the fool took it to Groves, who opened it, as he says, without looking at the direction; and as it was only signed with a flourish in the shape of the ace of clubs, and contained a few sporting allusions, the busybody took it to the colonel, pretending that he thought it was some joke offensive to the honour of the regiment. Then, of course, Dashmore was dragged over the coals, and after shuffling a little, which made matters a thousand times worse, he confessed that he rather thought it was Lieutenant Foxcroft's handwriting. So then I was closeted, and very politely advised to sell out."

"A parcel of precious idiots you seem to have been, as I ever happened to hear of," observed Mr. O'Donagough, coolly, "and with such sort of management, I cannot say that I think it very likely you would profit by any advice of mine. Not to mention that there would be a pretty strong probability of my being mixed up in the scrape, if I were to present myself to the public eye as your particular friend, Mr. Foxcroft."

"The *public* can't possibly get hold of it, O'Donagough," replied the ex-lieutenant eagerly, "for before I left Brighton the regiment received orders to prepare for the West Indies."

"A lucky dog you are then," replied Mr O'Donagough, with somewhat more of condescension in his manner. "In that case you have only to keep quiet till they are off, and then say you were obliged to sell out on account of your health."

"That is exactly what I meant to say," replied his comforted friend, "only I could not hide any thing from you, O'Donagough, after your kindness in waiting about that piquet money. I promise you, I shall never know a happy moment till I have paid it, and any thing you may happen to think of, that may help me to start again, will be just that sum in your own pocket, you know."

"That's all very well, Foxcroft—but it's a devilish deal easier to say what you'll do with money when you get it, than to find out where it is to be had. I give you my honour and word, that just at this moment, I no more know what to set you at, than if I had been born last week. When the season advances,

perhaps it is possible that I might find out some way or other in which you could be useful to me, and make a little money into the bargain."

"And upon my honour, O'Donagough, that is just what I should best like. You are a man of genius, first-rate genius, I've seen enough already to know that, and I am one that would not stop at any thing for a friend whom I admire and look up to, as I do you. I won't play piquet with you again, because you are a devilish deal too good a player for me; but I'll be ready to do any thing else that you may ask, and I'd be as true to you, as your own shadow."

"But there's nothing to be done for the next two months at the very least," replied Mr. O'Donagough. "The Christmas holidays must be well over before there is a chance of getting a common whist party together, without dreaming of doing any thing at the Clubs—into the very best of which I expect to get by and by. And what are you to do in the mean time, Foxcroft? Bath or Cheltenham would serve your turn better than London, I should think."

"I wish you could tell me, my dear friend,"

said Mr. Foxcroft abruptly, and with some little embarrassment, "whether since you have been in town you have found out any thing at all certain, and to be depended on, respecting that Miss Perkins you know, that used to be so much at your house at Brighton? Should you judge from what you have seen that she had any thing independent worth thinking about?"

"Upon my word, Foxcroft, I won't stand godfather to her ways and means. They seem to be living very decently, in a drawing-room apartment at Brompton, and I should suppose that whatever they have must be their own, and independent. But that is a question which must, as I conceive, be asked officially, before any positive information can be obtained. The only objection to this sort of plain sailing is, the awkwardness of getting off, if the thing is not likely to answer. But in this case I should not suppose there would be much difficulty about that either; I am pretty sure there is no brother in the case, and leaving town suddenly for a week or two would be all that was necessary."

"Well then, my dear fellow," returned Mr. Foxcroft, "while waiting for more important

business, I see no objection whatever to my bestowing as much time upon this as may suffice to ascertain whether there is anything to be got worth having. And I do assure you, that one of my chief motives for the speculation will be, the hope of speedily discharging my debt to you. But I most look to the ladies of your family for the means of setting about it. Do you think that Mrs. O'Donagough would object to taking me with her to call upon the Miss Perkinses?"

"Upon my word I don't know, Mr. Foxcroft. Mrs. O'Donagough has no carriage at present, nor will the equipage I intend for her be ready till after Christmas. But I suppose the business may be set going, as well by your meeting here, as by paying the lady a visit at her home. If you see your way clearly enough to go on, there will be no need of having Mrs. O'Donagough to escort you on your expeditions to Brompton."

There was something of dignity and hauteur in this speech, which convinced the aspirant lover that it would be necessary for him to be rather more cautious in tone and demeanour than formerly. But he was far from being discouraged by this; on the contrary it only

served to convince him that if there should prove some little difficulty in reaching again the rank of familiar household friend, which he had held at Brighton, it would be more worth having when he did attain it,—a mode of reasoning often acted upon by persons of the *ci-devant* Lieutenant's class, with very excellent and satisfactory results.

As soon as Mr. O'Donagough had ceased speaking, Mr. Foxcroft rose from his chair, and drawing a card from his waistcoat pocket, laid it upon the table before his illustrious friend, saying, very respectfully, "For the present, my dear sir, I will detain you no more, either with my hopes or my misadventures. That is my address; and I feel confident that now I have put you in possession of my views, your kindness will induce you to give me the advantage of meeting the lady in question at your house, as soon as you can make it convenient to do so." These words were accompanied by a very grave look, and a bow of much ceremony, which seemed to announce the speaker's intention of immediately withdrawing, producing altogether on the mind of Mr. O'Donagough the comfortable conviction, that he should always be able to keep his inferiors at a distance, when he

chose it; an idea which so greatly pleased him, that his manner instantly became as frank and familiar as in the days of his Brighton humility.

"No, no, Foxcroft! you must not go yet," he said. "Sit down again; I have fifty questions to ask about the set we used to meet at the billiard-room. And besides, you must not go, till I have settled with Mrs. O'Donagough for what day we shall ask the Perkinses. I don't think they are much engaged, so there will be no great difficulty about that.—And—I say, Foxcroft, a small quantity of love-making at a time will do, won't it? You must not wear out all your pretty speeches at once, you know —so I suppose you will have no objection to a rubber, if I can happen to get two good hands to help us?"

Smiling inwardly, to think how well he was able to take the measure of his superb friend's greatness; and outwardly, to show how grateful he felt for all the kindness bestowed upon him, Mr. Foxcroft declared himself delighted at the idea of once more battling for the odd trick with so skillful an adversary; and reseating himself in the excellent arm-chair he had before occupied near the fire, determined to be as gos-

sipping and agreeable as possible, in order to plant himself as firmly as heretofore in the good graces of the man, whom he felt that fate had destined to be his patron.

Having indulged himself in the flight which has been recounted above, Mr. O'Donagough relaxed for the next hour into as familiar a strain of discourse as Mr. Foxcroft himself could have desired; and at length brought it to a conclusion, by saying, "Come along, my fine fellow! Let us mount to the drawing room, and consult with Mrs. O'Donagough on this Perkins party."

Mr. Foxcroft, nothing loth, prepared to follow him; and as they mounted the stairs together, his loud bold laugh preceded them, which caused Mrs. O'Donagough to observe that "It was plain enough he had been well received, or he would not laugh in that free and easy style."

"Well received?" repeated Miss Patty, sharply, "and why not, I should like to know? There are some people who admire him, I can tell you, whatever you may do, and though he has got gray hair and a big nose, that is no reason for you to be uncivil to him."

"Hoity toity, Miss Patty! who is going to

be uncivil, I wonder? You have no more idea of dignity, and the sort of consequence attached to a certain style of living, than a baby. I wouldn't for the world be uncivil either to Foxcroft, or Dashmore, or Willis, or any old acquaintance whatever, and I am sure if the poor dear Sheepshanks were to come over, one and all, they would find me perfectly kind and condescending. But that need not prevent one's showing now and then that one knows what's what, and if you don't, take my word for it you'll——"

"I have brought Foxcroft back to you, my dear," said Mr. O'Donagough, entering unceremoniously before his friend, "to fix a day for our asking him to dinner. You must come and dine with us, Foxcroft; if it is but once and away, for old acquaintance sake, for you must know I don't mean to give regular dinners till the season begins. Mrs. O'Donagough will soon begin to receive company in an evening, once or twice a week perhaps. These are very good rooms for it, and I rather like a rubber you know. But I'm not fond of dinner company, except just in the season. It fatigues me, and, in short, I think it is a confounded bore. But we shall be often glad to see you of an evening,

Foxcroft. However, this first time, as I said, you must come to dinner. What day shall it be, Mrs. O'D.? We'll have the Perkinses the same day, I think."

Mrs. O'Donagough was preparing her three chins, and her thick articulation of dignified words, in reply to this proposal, when she was abruptly checked by Patty's favourite hand-clapping, and the joyous exclamation which accompanied it: "That's right, papa! That will be capital fun, won't it? Oh my! How pleased they will be! That is, I mean about coming to dine here, the first time, and all. Of course I don't mean anything else. I'll go myself, mama, see if I don't, to carry the invitation. Do you and papa fix the day, and I'll take care you shall have the company."

There was something so paralyzing to hauteur and elegance in this jolly outbreak, that Mrs. O'Donagough

Changed her hand, and checked her pride,

as she answered, "Very well, dearest! You *shall* go yourself, if you wish it, and the page shall attend you. It is the same affectionate, warm heart as ever, you see, Captain Foxcroft! I do not believe that either the court or the

city will ever change this dear child's generous unassuming character! Whatever day will best suit you, Captain Foxcroft, I shall be excessively happy to receive you."

"Well, then, let's say Monday next, at half-past five. Perhaps that means six, you know, but it's as well to say half-past five, to make you punctual," said Mr. O'Donagough.

The day and the hour were each welcomed by a bow of grateful acquiescence from the invited guest; who, after receiving one finger from Mr. O'Donagough, two from his lady, and a whole hand, accompanied by a broad grin, from Patty, departed, to meditate on the unexpected and rather puzzling grandeur of his friend and creditor, and to make up his mind as to the smallest sum for which he should agree to bind himself to Miss Matilda Perkins for life.

Hardly had the house-door closed upon him, than Patty, who, according to custom, had flown to the window that she might watch his progress down the street, turned sharply round, and setting her arms a-kimbo, said resolutely, "Now then I shall set off for Brompton."

Mr. O'Donagough laughed, and drawing her upon his knee as he sat loungingly in an arm chair near her, said,—

"Well done, Patty! I like you for that, girl. I have a notion that you will not be carrying coals to Newcastle. You are a good-hearted girl, that I will say, and ready to do as you would be done by. And talking of that, Patty, I want you to tell me just exactly every thing that Sir Henry Seymour did and said the day he came after you to Brompton. They tell me at his club that he is gone out of town, and that's all very well, as far as it goes, for of course he may have his engagements like any other man, particularly as nobody of his sort of style and fashion ever does show themselves in town till after Christmas, yet still I can't help wondering a little that we don't hear from him."

Patty grew exceedingly red during this speech, and having effectually struggled herself off her father's knee, bounced to the end of the room, and seizing the handle of the lock that she might open the door and escape, turned about and said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you ought, to ask a girl such questions. It will be pretty times for the young ones, if they are to repeat to the old ones, all that they say to one another!"

"Fair and softly, my beauty, if you please,"

said her father. "Walk back again, Miss Patty, or you may chance to be sorry you didn't."

The look and tone were of the kind that insured obedience, and the pouting Patty returned three steps into the room.

"Nearer, Miss, if you please, nearer," said the angry parent. Patty made three more steps towards him, and then, apparently to save trouble, he rolled himself forward by aid of the excellent castors of his arm-chair, till he was pretty nearly face to face with her.

"Now then, Miss Patty O'Donagough, let us understand each other. When I see fit, like a kind and affectionate father as I am, to ask you a question of importance about a gentleman that you assure me is in love with you, I don't choose to be told that I ought to be ashamed of myself. I believe your mama will inform you, if you will ask her, that I am not much given to trouble myself about women's gossipings, and that few ladies have been less troubled by the curiosity of a husband, than herself. But in this business of Sir Henry Seymour there is a good deal more to be considered, I promise you, than merely your fancy in the choice of a sweetheart. He

is, as I have ascertained, a man of immense fortune, and great consequence. I made his acquaintance on board ship, as well as you, Miss Patty, and I have renewed it too, under circumstances which render it extremely likely that he may be useful to me in one way or another. If he is really and truly your lover, and means to marry you, I am too good a father, notwithstanding all your impertinence, to think of anything whatever but your advantage, and all other use that I might make of him, should be put aside and forgotten; but I want to know a little how the affair really stands between you. I certainly think that there was something very particular in his running after you to Brompton in that eager style, when, as I know well enough, he would have been exceedingly glad to have kept away from us altogether. This, as well as the manner in which I found you together, does make it really seem likely that those saucy eyes of yours have turned his head, and left him no choice but to make you my Lady Seymour. Now then, I have explained myself, and without being at all ashamed about the matter, as it seems to me, I may just take the liberty of asking the long and the short of what passed

between you. Speak up, Patty! don't be afraid. There's nobody going to scold you for having a sweetheart. What was it the young man said to you? Did he out and out ask you to be his wife?

"Well, then, you may kill me, if you will," replied Patty, blubbering, "but I won't be bullied, that's what I won't, into telling tales of my own true love."

"The deuce take the girl!" replied the angry father. "She is a fool after all, I'll be hanged if she isn't, though I fancied her so monstrously clever. I shall go out, Mrs. O'D., and leave her to you; only remember that I expect to be told whether the young fellow has really promised to marry her or not. I know that he thinks her a good piece older than she really is—but I saw no harm in that, and didn't contradict him. And in short, if he has a fancy for having such a silly girl for a wife, I don't mean to baulk him—that's all. So now fall to, and have a good talk together, and let me know what comes of it, when I come home."

As a matter of course, the first part of the *tête à tête* between the mother and daughter was occupied by abusing their *man kind.*

Both ladies were equally ready to declare that he was a brute, and a tyrant, and that there never was such a plague; but this portion of the conference having at length been brought to a satisfactory close, Mrs. O'Donagough coaxingly led the discourse to the subject which she had been commanded to discuss with her daughter, and certainly managed it with some skill, inasmuch as it ended without a quarrel, for which, it must be confessed, the young lady held herself prepared.

"It is quite nonsense, Patty," she said, "to attempt talking with men about these sort of things; but to a mother you know it is different. A woman never forgets her youth, whatever a man does, and you need not be afraid to tell me any of the little things that have happened between you and Jack—Sir Henry Seymour, I mean. Of course you are almost too young as yet for anything very serious to have passed, but I don't doubt that you know pretty well what he is about—don't you, my dear?"

"I am sure I don't know what *you* are about, nor what you mean, either of you, tormenting me so. I dare say the real reason Jack does not come to see me is, that he saw

that morning when papa walked with him, what a horrid sort of plague he was," replied Patty.

"Likely enough, my dear! But don't fret your dear heart about that, Patty. He'll come again, never fear. When a man is really in love, he is not so easily cured, I can tell you. I could give you proof of that if I chose it. But I'd rather talk of your own beautiful self, dearest. How did he look when he gave you that lock of his hair, darling?"

"Lord, mama! As if I should be likely to stare him in the face all the time! I have got the lock of hair, and that's enough for you to know, of all conscience," replied Patty, again growing very red.

"I wonder how it happened that he left your beautiful ringlet behind him?" resumed Mrs. O'Donagough.

"Lord! what wonderments you do make about nothing, mama! I should like to know how any one broken in upon, and tormented as he was, could know or remember anything he did, or said?"

"That's very true indeed, Patty; and when he took that lock of hair at first, I suppose he gave you to understand that he loved you

dearly, and that it was for that reason he asked for it, didn't he?"

"Well! I never did hear the like of you and papa!" exclaimed Patty, indignantly; "I should like to know what it is you do expect me to tell you? If you will promise not to plague me any more, I will tell you one thing, and if that won't satisfy you, I am sure I don't know what will—Jack kissed me, then! downright kissed me. What d'ye say to that? I'm sure I don't know what you *would* have."

"Very well, Patty, don't agitate yourself, my dear, to talk any more about it! I do think his kissing you does say a great deal. Such a very well-behaved young man as he always seemed to be, would never have thought of such a thing, I am quite sure, if it had not been by way of a declaration," said Mrs. O'Donagough, very gravely, and with every appearance of being extremely well satisfied. "Now go, my dear girl!" she added. "Go and get ready for your walk to Brompton. It will be a pleasure, won't it, Patty, to tell dear good Matilda that she is to meet her old favourite, Foxcroft? But, poor thing! I doubt very much, Patty, if he will ever think of her seriously. She is so *very* thin!"

"Matilda won't die an old maid; she's too good for that, I'm sure," returned Patty, with all the ardour of friendship.

"Well, my dear, we shall see," said Mrs. O'Donagough, looking very intelligent. "But go now and get ready. The page shall walk after you, and that will be very nice, won't it? I am sure I wish you were to happen to meet Sir Henry! He has never seen you in proper style yet."

CHAPTER XXV.

A DINNER PARTY—THE PLOT THICKENS.

Patty and her page reached Belle Vue Terrace in safety, but without meeting Sir Henry, who, to say truth, was stretching his leave of absence to the very utmost, to put off as long as possible the chance of any such rencontre. But fortunately Patty, notwithstanding her early submission to the tender passion, had nothing of the green and yellow nature in her disposition, and reached the abode of her friend with a colour as fresh as a rose, and in the highest spirits possible.

"Good morning, Miss Matilda! good morning, Miss Louisa," she began. "I should just like to know, Matilda, how much you would choose to give for the very best news that ever you heard in all your born days? Would you give me your watch?"

"What *do* you mean, Patty," demanded her friend with considerable agitation.

"Now can't you guess what I mean? Tell me, honestly, what you should call the best news you ever heard in your life? Never mind Louisa. Speak out."

"Good gracious, Patty, how you do torture me! Cruel, cruel girl! As if you did not know well enough without my telling you! For Heaven's sake let me know at once! Have you heard that Foxcroft is expected in town?"

"Upon my honour and life I never heard any such thing, Matilda," replied Patty, very demurely.

Not all the full-blown fresh remembrances of the beautiful drawing-rooms in Curzon Street could restrain the indignation of Miss Matilda Perkins on hearing these chilling words. "I wish to heaven you wouldn't come here, Miss O'Donagough, tormenting us to death with your absurd nonsense. I really think you are old enough to know better," she exclaimed.

"And I," returned Patty, laughing, "should have thought you, not only old enough, but a great deal *too* old to quarrel with your best friend in such a hurry, just because she wanted to have a bit of a joke."

"Oh dear me! my dear Miss Patty! don't think for a moment that poor Matilda wants to quarrel with you. I am sure there is nothing further from her thoughts, for she loves the very ground you walk on. Only you know, my dear, that her poor head is for ever running upon the name she mentioned, and therefore you must please to excuse her," said Miss Louisa.

"I'll excuse her fast enough," replied Patty, "if she won't be such a fool, and look so grumpy. Come, Matilda! cheer up. It is as true as the gospel that I did not hear Foxcroft was expected, but I never said that he wasn't come."

"Come!" screamed Matilda in the shrillest voice that ever issued from the breast of a lady in love; "come! Patty? Surely it is impossible! Such happiness is a great deal too much to bear!"

"Is it?" said Patty, nodding her head. "Then, mercy upon us, Miss Louisa, what will become of her when she hears that the gentleman is coming to dine with us on Monday, and that I am come with the page walking all the way after me, as grand as possible, to invite you both to come and

meet him? What do you think of that, Miss Matilda?"

"What do I think of it? Oh! my adored Patty! My heart feels too large for my bosom! Can you forgive me? Darling, dearest girl! Think what my feelings must be at this moment! May I believe your words, my dearest, dearest friend? May I trust my ears? Foxcroft in town, and I invited to meet him! Oh Foxcroft! Foxcroft!"

Here poor Miss Matilda's emotions perfectly overpowered her, and she threw herself on the sofa at full length, with a sort of kicking movement in her feet that really looked quite convulsive.

"Poor dear girl!" exclaimed her sister, opening a cupboard, and taking out a small bottle of hartshorn; "it is too much for her! Smell this, my dear! let me rub your poor temples with it!" And suiting the action to the word, she drew the cork from the little phial, and receiving the pungent fluid upon her fingers began to apply it with much eagerness and much friction to the temples of her recumbent sister. The remedy was effectual. Starting from the sofa, and standing, with more strength than the frightened Louisa had given

her credit for, upon her feet, she exclaimed rather hastily—

"Good gracious, Louisa! what are you doing to me? I shall have red patches all over my face, and my eyes will be swelled out of my head. For God's sake take that beastly stuff away, I hate it!"

"You had better not send it away yet, Matilda," said Patty. "For if you begin kicking and sprawling at such a rate just because you heard that you were going to dine with the gentleman, what on earth will become of you when I go on, and describe all the looks, and the sighs, and the hints, and the blinks I got when I began talking of you?"

"Did you, indeed, my dear?" cried Miss Louisa, with a mixture of astonishment and pleasure; "think of that, Matilda! Oh! my dear child! What a blessing it will be if it all comes right at last!"

"It will, it will come right!" exclaimed Matilda, in a sort of ecstacy. "I know he loves me!—I saw it in every dear working feature on that last heart-breaking day when we walked together on the Pier. The rain came down in torrents, the wind blew, the sea dashed over us! I never shall forget his

countenance. I am certain that every drop which reached his skin—and I know he was wet through—I am certain that every drop was an agony to him, because of me!"

Here a pocket handkerchief, which might, perhaps, have wiped away tears produced by far less delightful feelings, was drawn from its retreat under the sofa-cushion, and pressed to the gentle lady's eyes.

"Oh dear! oh dear! don't cry so, Matilda!" said her affectionate sister, looking very much disposed to weep for company,—"I am sure it is enough to break one's heart to see how she does suffer about these little love-affairs! But suppose this was to end in marriage after all, Matilda! Think of that, my dear!—Upon my word and honour, Miss O'Donagough, I think there seems more chance this time, from what you say, than ever I remember; and I ought to be some judge, we have had so many little things of the kind."

"Oh! oh!—You say WE, do you, Miss Louisa?" replied Patty, looking very knowing. "What, you have had your share, too, have you?"

"Oh, dear no!—Not me, Miss Patty. I never had anything of the sort happen to me

in my life. I said WE, because you know, I am always so much interested about everything that happens to Matilda. Oh no! thank God! I have never had any troubles of that kind myself; but to be sure, I have suffered terribly at times, about Matilda. Disappointments are such sad things, you know, my dear —and gentlemen, I must say, do often behave very ill."

"Well, I'll be hanged if I think Foxcroft means to behave ill.—But time will show!" replied Patty. "And now," she added in a whisper, "I want you to come here, Matilda, up to this window, that I may talk to you a little about myself. Do you know that both papa and mama have been at me to-day like two tigers, because they don't think Jack makes love to me fast enough. If he's out of London, he can't be in it,—that's all I say,—any more than he could be aboard the ship when he was gone away from it—and yet, you know as well as I do—for I'm sure I've told you so fifty times, that he kissed me at the very last moment, and I found him true-hearted again, didn't I, when we met; and now, he kissed me again, you know, and so haven't I every reason to expect he'll come back true-hearted again?"

"Unquestionably you have, my dearest girl!" replied her friend, "It is nonsense to doubt it.—But old people, I mean even elderly people, are always suspicious. I'm sure, there's my poor dear sister there, who is twenty years older in her thoughts and ways than she ought to be for her age, I am quite positively sure that she has stopped very advantageous marriages for me, over and over again; only because she never thought things went on fast enough, and was for ever suspecting that people meant nothing, when I happened to know that they meant a good deal. But thanks to you, my darling Patty, I think we shall manage better this time.—Dearest Foxcroft! How my heart seems to spring towards him! Did he look well, Patty?—Was he as tall and elegant in his appearance as ever?"

"Why, as to that, you know, Matilda, I never did see any great beauty in him.—But that's your affair, not mine, and lucky it is that tastes differ. As for tallness, indeed, he is just as tall as ever—but I think his nose looked monstrous large."

"Oh, Patty!—Love is love! There's no accounting for it, in any other way—but I give you my honour, that I think Foxcroft one of the very handsomest men I ever saw."

"Well, my dear, so much the better.—And I dare say he thinks you one of the very handsomest women. But now I must go, or else mama will say that I sha'nt come again, as she did last time. Not that it much signifies to be sure, for here I am, you see."

"Stop one moment, Patty!" replied her friend; "you must positively tell me what I shall wear on Monday. Do you think I look best with my hair in bands, or in ringlets?"

"I don't think it makes much difference, Matilda.—But, perhaps, bands will be best, because your hair is rather thin, you know—and mine's so monstrous thick, that it will make it look worse."

"It is very easy to fill it up with a few flowers, you know—I should not like to have such a mop as yours, my dear—unless, indeed, it curled as beautifully as yours does. But, of course, Patty, every body knows that you have got the very finest hair in the world,"—said Miss Matilda, luckily correcting herself. After this *amende*, the friends parted as tenderly as they met, and were in an excellent frame of mind on the following Monday for showing off to advantage the graces of the female character, when warmed by the gentle influence

of friendship, for they did not fail to caress each other at every convenient opportunity.

This eventful Monday proved a day of joy to more female hearts than one; for on the morning of it, Mr. O'Donagough once more called at Sir Henry Seymour's club to inquire for him, and with better fortune than before, met him at the door of it. The pleasure which this meeting occasioned to the elder gentleman was not altogether attributable to fatherly affection, for he felt some tolerably strong misgivings as to the correctness of the interpretation put by his young daughter upon the gentleman's feelings towards her. But this caused but little difference in the earnestness of his wish to cultivate the young baronet's acquaintance. To have caught such a husband for his daughter, would, beyond all doubt, have been very agreeable; but, as he wisely remembered, Patty had lost no time yet, and the young and independent Sir Henry playing whist with him, was an image very nearly, if not quite, as agreeable to his imagination, as that of his making love to his daughter. Besides, it was evident that his endeavouring to obtain the former, was far from being likely to impede the latter scheme, and he, therefore,

put forth his best-got-up, and most beguiling style of salutation, and after a few friendly words, expressive of long-felt kindness, but cautiously free from any allusion to their nautical acquaintance, he invited him in a very gentleman-like off-hand style to come and dine with him.

Mr. O'Donagough perceived that the young man hesitated, and very skilfully changing the subject, instead of pressing for an answer, began talking of General Hubert and his family, deploring the heavy loss produced by their absence, and joyously anticipating their return. Having expatiated very eloquently upon this theme for about five minutes, he resumed the former one, saying carelessly, "Well, you'll dine with us then, my dear Sir Henry? By the way, do you ever play a rubber? It seems quite the fashion among the young men now-a-days, and if you ever do such a thing, I'll promise you one to-night."

Now Sir Henry Seymour really did know how to play a rubber very well for so young a man, and moreover was very fond of it, though without any propensity whatever for gambling; yet too indifferent about money to be very scrupulous as to the stakes. It was not, how-

ever, this love of whist which made Mr. O'Donagough's invitation appear incalculably less disagreeable after he had heard of the rubber, than before, for he remembered in a moment that when a man is playing whist, he can hardly be suspected of making love, and that if poor Patty could be taught to let him behave himself discreetly, it would be exceedingly desirable to keep on such friendly terms with Mr. O'Donagough as should render it an act of treachery were he to betray either to the family of General Hubert, or to his guardian, Sir Edward Stephenson, the secret which he had confided to him. Under this impression, he now readily accepted the invitation, not failing to intimate as he did so, that he was a decided whist-player whenever he found a card-table ready to admit him.

Patty could hardly have been more delighted had the young man addressed her with, "Will you marry me?" than was her papa on hearing this declaration; but much too good a tactician to permit the feeling to be perceptible, he nodded an easy *sans souciante*, "good day," adding "at six o'clock then," and departed.

Mr. O'Donagough's next care was to secure a *proper fourth*, and in this he succeeded to his

entire satisfaction, unearthing one of those dry-looking, adust, Roman-nosed individuals, who by dint of originally procuring well-made garments, and then preserving them inviolably clean, are often declared to be very gentleman-like-looking men by those who have not the faculty of interpreting the hieroglyphics of the mind, as traced on the countenance. What Mr. Armondyle's fortune or profession might be, it was no particular person's business to inquire; and the question, if asked, must have remained unanswered, as nobody knew anything at all about it. The only information which he ever volunteered concerning himself was, that he was a bachelor, liked a sober rubber now and then, and was pleased to be invited to dinner where there were woodcocks. He belonged to most of the fashionable unprofessional clubs, but was never known to take any bodily refreshment at any of them. He wore golloshes and a very large cloak in bad weather, together with a substantial silk umbrella, having his name engraven on it; but nobody ever saw him use any conveyance (at his own expense at least), except his own legs, yet somehow or other, nobody ever saw him either wet or splashed, or the precise

nicety of his dress and person in any way deranged.

No human being ever heard him say a silly thing; it is true he did not talk much, carefully avoiding all subjects upon which men divide themselves into parties, so that his opinions were, for the most part, as unknown as his birth, parentage, education, and means of living. Even the yawning gulf which divides the Conservative from the Destructive, seemed a broad highway for him, for though nobody ever dreamed of accusing him of a change in principle or opinion, each party fancied he belonged to them in turn; and as neither could give any better reason for thinking so, than their own arbitrary interpretation of a quiet smile, or a gentle movement of the hand, each were at liberty to believe so still. One or two very old acquaintances, indeed, who fancied that they knew him better, have been heard to declare that they did not believe Mr. Armondyle would draw off his right glove to prevent a revolution, or his left to insure it. He knew mankind well enough, they said, to be very sure that, let what would happen, there would always be, somewhere or other, a game at something or other, to amuse idle men who had

nothing particular to do; and with this assurance he would be well contented to go on shuffling and cutting to his dying day, without troubling himself to ascertain who was the better player, and who the worse, in the great game of politics in which he had never been invited to take a hand. It was sometimes gossipped in the clubs that Armondyle had lost immensely, or that Armondyle had won immensely; but neither the one report or the other appeared to have the slightest effect on his *manière d'être*. He was ever the same neat, placid, polite person, whom nothing had occurred to disarrange, and whom it would be extremely difficult to discompose.

This gentleman made the dinner-party at Mr. O'Donagough's amount to eight; and as of these four were gentlemen, and four ladies, Miss Louisa Perkins was led to observe that she had never in her life seen any dinner-table so perfectly well arranged.

Of the entertainment it is unnecessary to speak at large; Mrs. O'Donagough had done her very best. Mr. Wright furnished the wines, which Mr. Foxcroft took upon himself to declare were excellent, and yet the gentlemen repaired to the drawing-room the very

moment Mrs. O'Donagough sent to say that the coffee was ready; a good old custom which Mr. O'Donagough declared it was his intention invariably to observe, unless some very young men happened to dine with him, and then he should certainly relax a little, he said, as it was never fair to "come the old codger over boys, and if they liked to be a little tipsy, he should always let them be so."

Sir Henry Seymour, however, did not appear to be classed under this category. He produced no alteration in the ordinary arrangement, and if it was even intended, by way of experiment, that he too should get a little tipsy before the card-playing began, this first visit was not considered as a fitting time for it.

Though Patty was seated at table next to her "darling Jack," she was the one to whom the entertainment seemed the longest and the least agreeable; for the young man, though good-humoured, and even kind in his manner of addressing her, made no nearer approximation to love-making in his manner than if she had been sixty, and he fourscore. Her father perceived this, as well as herself, and it was immediately determined in the little committee on ways and means which sat for ever in his brain, that the

young man should pay for the obduracy of his heart at the card-table. Not indeed on the present occasion; that would be contrary to all the rules and regulations made and provided in such cases; but steadfastly purposed was Mr. O'Donagough that if it should finally be proved that Sir Henry Seymour was *not* in love with his daughter, he should pay sharp damages for his indifference. Miss Louisa Perkins, untroubled by any passion, tender or otherwise, smiled, and ate, and smiled again. Mr. Armondyle endeavoured to make himself comfortable, which was indeed now, as at every other moment of his existence, his primary object, while Mrs. O'Donagough, who had conceived a sort of mystical idea that he was a person of consequence, poured out civilities upon him with a copious profusion which no sang froid less perfect than that of Mr. Armondyle could have stood unmoved—his most animated reply, however, was but a very slight inclination of the head. But, as of course might have been anticipated, the most animated group in the party consisted of Miss Matilda Perkins, Mr. Foxcroft, and the blushing troop of little loves and graces which were playing between them.

It was in truth a labour of love, the toilet of Miss Matilda, on that auspicious day! and equally captious and curious were it to inquire with a critical spirit either into the time consumed, or the effect produced by it. Suffice it to say that her sister, in the short moment that was left for review before stepping into their hackney-coach, pronounced that she looked "very nice indeed."

The result was all that the gentle Matilda's heart required, for, from the manner, and indeed, from the words of Mr. Foxcroft, it appeared incontestable that he thought she looked very nice too. Obedient to the hint of his patron, this gentleman made the very best use of every moment that preceded his being called, *bon gré, mal gré*, to take his place at the card-table. Never, to be sure, did the most exemplary saint invoke maledictions on the fifty-two offending elements which combine to form the hateful abomination called a pack of cards, with more heartfelt zeal than did the dejected Matilda, as she sat forsaken and forlorn on a couch which commanded the fullest possible view of the form and countenance she loved! Poor lady! Surely no female heart under similar circumstance can fail to feel for

her. More moving accidents may assuredly be found to employ the historian's pen,—sorrows, which on the face of them bear marks of deeper tragedy, may be recounted, and a reader's sympathy be claimed for sufferings more fatal—but for pure, perfect, unmitigated, vexation of spirit, it could hardly be surpassed. A lover, (within a quarter of an inch a declared lover,) to be sitting in the same room with a young lady of thirty-six, and yet absolutely precluded from the possibility of uttering a single word to her! Even the pleasure of looking unremittingly in his face was not long allowed her, for Mr. O'Donagough, who naturally felt that the payment of his dinner was not to be risked by the presence of any ladies, old, young, or middle-aged, no sooner, by the course of cutting, lost Mr. Armondyle as a partner, than he unceremoniously requested the female part of the company to establish themselves in the other drawing-room; a piece of tyranny against which there was no appeal, but which made the four ladies rehearse in chorus that well-known sentiment of the fair, namely, "that there is no spectacle which the eye can rest upon, throughout the whole surface of the globe called earth, one-thousandth part

so detestable as seeing the only four men in company sit down to whist."

The banished ladies (poor things!) naturally fell into two tête-à-têtes; in one of which all the minuter circumstances of Mrs. O'Donagough's present, and approaching greatness, were voluminously rehearsed to Miss Louisa's patient ear, while in the other, the younger ladies resumed the eclogue style, whispering rhapsodies respecting their beloved ones.

The party altogether, however, produced more of the results wished for than generally happens where expectation has been so highly wrought—our poor Patty being, in fact, the only one disappointed essentially. Mr. O'Donagough had made up his mind to be equally well contented by Sir Henry Seymour's showing symptoms of love-making to his daughter, or money-losing to himself; and therefore, when he received six five-pound notes from the young baronet, together with a very cordial declaration of their having had an excellent rubber, he was not disappointed. His lady, too much occupied in "tasting her corners," as she called devouring the compounds of grease and garlick of which she had superintended the preparation, to have time for

closely watching the proceedings of her daughter and Sir Henry felt perfectly satisfied, because she perceived he was talking to her; and this, together with the unwearied admiration of Miss Louisa at every thing she saw, and every thing she heard, sufficed to make her declare that it was "a most delightful dinner-party." Mr. Armondyle shared the winnings and the satisfaction of his host, being too well pleased at finding a new house to dine at, to permit his being critical at the dinner. Miss Louisa ate a great deal of apple-pie and custard, to which she was particularly attached; felt conscious that she was a prodigious favourite with the Amphitronia of the feast; and, better than all, began to entertain very serious hopes that her poor dear darling tender-hearted Matilda would get a husband at last, after all the quantity of cruel disappointments which the perfidious false-heartedness of men had made her suffer. Sir Henry Seymour was quite as well pleased as any of them. For while the skilful O'Donagough contrived to make him constantly remember his own near connection with General Hubert, he set him completely at his ease respecting Patty, whom the wily father spoke

of as a mere child, but one greatly petted and beloved by Mrs. Hubert and her daughter. At the moment when this affectionate partiality was dwelt upon, Sir Henry Seymour might have been seen, had any body watched him, to fix his eyes upon the object of it with a very *naïve* expression of astonishment; but his own superlatively sweet temper succeeded, after a short struggle with his common sense, to convince him that it was all very natural, considering how very kind-hearted and affectionate the poor girl was, and how perfectly impossible it was for her to help being vulgar.

But general as the satisfaction of the company seemed to be—for even poor Patty convinced herself, before the end of the evening, that the difference in Jack was only because there were so many plaguy people watching them—general as was this satisfaction, it was nothing in comparison to the heartfelt happiness of the lady and gentleman for whom the entertainment had been originally planned. The feelings of Mr. Foxcroft, who, as he meditated on the "independence" dwelt on by Mr. O'Donagough, became what might truly be termed *desperately* attached to the fair Matilda, were gratified in the greatest degree by perceiving that, however

favourable the impression he had made upon her at Brighton, he had rather gained, than lost, by absence. For not even in the last trying moments when they had got wet through together on the Pier, had she shown such unequivocal marks of attachment, as when he trod upon her toe during that day's dinner. Of the state of Miss Matilda herself it would really be difficult to speak at length without deviating from the necessary sobriety of prose; so elevating, entrancing, soul-subduing were the emotions which took possession of her during the ineffable two hours of their juxtaposition at the dinner-table.

Nothing, in short, could in all ways have succeeded better than this opening of the O'Donagoughs' London campaign; and the busy future rose before the eyes of all, decked in the very brightest colours, and pregnant with all sorts of agreeable possibilities.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. FOXCROFT MAKES AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE, AND IS REFUSED.

FROM the day of Mr. Foxcroft's first London conversation with Mr. O'Donagough, he had completely made up his mind as to the line of conduct he should pursue respecting Miss Matilda Perkins, and for some time he strictly adhered to it. Circumstances afterwards occurred which occasioned some trifling change; but the principle continued the same, and no one, judging of his conduct in an unprejudiced manner, could possibly accuse him of inconsistency. To take a step so important in life as that of marriage, without making himself properly acquainted with the lady he was to wed, or rather, with all the most important circumstances respecting her, would have been an imprudence of which Mr. Foxcroft, with all his indiscretions, would have been quite incapable. He purposed, however, in the first instance, to

assure himself that his tender passion would, beyond all doubt, be acceptable to the lady, if future inquiries should authorize a declaration of it; and this fact would certainly have been satisfactorily established in the judgment of a shyer man than the ex-lieutenant, by the manner in which his experimental advances had been received.

Satisfied on this point, the next step in the process was to make a morning visit to the Miss Perkinses at their own dwelling, where, after having paid his compliments to them, without any apology for the liberty, and quite as a matter of course, he ventured to solicit a private audience of the elder sister, according to the mode in which it is usual to request leave to "speak a few words to a young lady's papa."

In this case, as in all others of the kind, the proposal for such a conference announced the object of it to all the parties concerned. Even Miss Louisa, though not particularly rapid in her conclusions, experienced not the slightest doubt on the subject, and turning to her sister with great propriety of manner, she said, "Matilda, my dear, Captain Foxcroft wishes to speak to me upon a little business, I believe. Will you be so kind as just to go out of the room, my dear?"

In her very inmost heart, perhaps, Miss Matilda might have thought that, considering all that had already passed between them, this ceremony might have been dispensed with; but, too happy at this near approach of the fulfilment of all her wishes to quarrel with trifles, she turned one look of blushing languishment upon her lover, and left the room.

Mr. Foxcroft waited till the door was closed, and no longer; nothing in the slightest degree like embarrassment shook his nerves; he meant to make a straight-forward proposal of marriage, subject to the possibility of being able to make up, by means of the lady's fortune and his own, such an income as he thought might be sufficient to secure the happiness of the woman he adored.

Miss Louisa who (from a sort of "mother-wit," it must be presumed, for no circumstance of the kind had ever happened to her before,) was quite aware of what was to follow, placed herself exactly in the middle of the sofa, looking a little more demure than usual, and making a movement with her right hand, which indicated that the gentleman was to place himself in a chair opposite, awaited his avowal with great decorum.

"My dear Miss Perkins," he began, with a sort of affectionate familiarity that seemed a foretaste of brotherly love, "my dear Miss Perkins, you must, I feel quite sure, have long ago discovered the state of my affections—you must be aware that I adore your sister."

"I certainly have thought, Captain Foxcroft," replied Miss Louisa, blushing a little at the fervour of his expressions, "I certainly have fancied that I saw something like a little partiality."

"Ah, my dear madam!" resumed the lover, "such measured language can but ill paint my feelings. But I will not pain your sensitive delicacy by dwelling too explicitly on the vehemence of a passion, which our unfortunate sex has never been able to inspire in yourself. What I would first ask is, whether you think your charming sister, to whom I am too much a man of honour ever as yet to have confessed my love, has still a heart to bestow on me in return, and whether I may hope to receive in my behalf, the friendly approbation of yourself?"

"Oh, dear me! as to myself, Captain Foxcroft, I am sure there is nothing whatever I would not do or say to secure the happiness of

my dear sister Matilda in the married state; for it has, indeed, for a good many years, been my very greatest wish. Not, Captain Foxcroft, that this is to argue anything against her youngness, for I began to wish it when she was very young, because, I mean, of her great affectionateness of temper, and all that. And then about her own heart, I think that, may be, if you was just to ask her yourself, it would perhaps be the best means of finding out what she thinks about you."

"So encouraged, my dear Miss Perkins, I may nerve my courage to the attempt. But, alas! before I can throw myself at her feet, the odious trammels of the world force from me another inquiry, hardly less necessary, such unhappily is the formation of society, than the first. Before I offer my hand in marriage to your sister, my dear Miss Louisa, it is absolutely necessary that I should ascertain from you whether our united incomes would amount to such a sum as I should deem sufficient for ensuring the happiness of the woman I so fondly adore. My own resources are of the most fixed aud unobjectionable kind, but I grieve to say, that ample as they are for my own expenditure, I cannot consider them suffi-

cient to secure, without some trifling addition, such a degree of elegance in our establishment, as I should wish my wife to enjoy. Will you tell me then, with the same frankness with which I ask it, what is your sister's fortune?"

"I will tell you, sir, without any sort of deception whatever," replied Miss Louisa, not, however, without some little symptoms of hesitation in her voice and manner. "Of course it is right and proper that you should know everything, for who has a right to ask, if it isn't a gentleman who comes forward in such an honourable manner to offer to be her husband; but before I come to any particulars, I should just wish to say that there is not a person in the world that would be happier upon quite a small little income, than my sister Matilda. It stands to reason that I must know her if anybody can, and I am quite certain sure that if she had a good husband she would not care the least bit in the world about money, whether it was a little more, or a little less."

"Charming, disinterested creature!" exclaimed Mr. Foxcroft, with great emotion. "But do you not perceive, my dear madam, that the less care her noble nature bestows upon such subjects, the more incumbent it is upon the

husband she honours with her love to attend to them? Never should I forgive myself if I suffered the blind vehemence of passion to hurry me into a step that might bring privation and inconvenience upon her! No, Miss Louisa; on that point my mind is irrevocably made up. Nothing, not even the having to tear her lovely image from my bleeding heart, should induce me to commit an imprudence which, with my views upon the subject, must in my own conscience be classed as a crime. I beseech you, therefore, to end this terrible suspense by telling me, with all the openness you have promised, the exact amount of your sister's fortune."

"I will, sir," said Miss Louisa, gravely, and with evident embarrassment; "but I am sorry to say that I fear it is not so much as you may think necessary. My sister Matilda has got very little fortune, sir."

A certain relaxation of the muscles about the eyes and mouth of Mr. Foxcroft might have shown a keen observer, that the ardour of his feelings was relaxing too, but ere his words could make this manifest, the possibility occurred to him of his deeming a fortune *sufficient* under his present circumstances, which Miss

Perkins might deem inadequate to the expectations of so dashing a personage as himself, and he therefore replied, not with a frown, but a smile, as he looked round upon the neat little apartment, "Perhaps, my dear lady, your ideas may be less moderate than mine. Your mode of living at Brighton, and your comfortable home here, prove that you must have each of you a sum of money at your disposal, by no means to be considered as contemptible."

Miss Louisa shook her head. "That notion has deceived other gentlemen before you, Captain Foxcroft," said she; "but the fact is, that the chief part, by far, of what we live upon, belongs to me. I had three thousand pounds left to me by an uncle of my mother's, a very little time after I was born, and so it went on, you know, growing more and more, till I came to be one and twenty; and soon after that our father and mother both died, leaving little or nothing behind them, because he was in an office, and that was what they lived upon. Matilda had all, however, which I am sure was very right and proper; but it did not come to above five hundred pounds altogether, and the interest of that is no very great matter. But my money, which is in the funds, as well as

her little fortune, brings me in just two hundred pounds a-year, and with that we contrive to live very comfortably, always going to the sea every year, and me doing everything I can, everywhere, to set off Matilda to advantage."

While Miss Louisa made this long speech, Mr. Foxcroft sat with his eyes steadily fixed upon her; his countenance during the time undergoing several alterations, of which, however, she was in no degree aware, for the kind-hearted lady greatly disliked the task she was thus obliged to perform, and instead of meeting the lover's varying eye, she kept her own steadily fixed upon the border of a night-cap that she was hemming with unbroken perseverance.

Just as she finished her oration, Mr. Foxcroft rose, and, somewhat to her surprise placed himself close beside her on the sofa. In fact, he sat *very* close beside her, for the sofa was a small one, and she had seated herself, as before stated, precisely in the middle of it; so, to make more room, she withdrew herself as far as the dimensions of the seat would permit, expecting, with considerable anxiety, the answer which he had thus approached her to make.

Nor did she wait long for the sound of his voice, though its accents came not, in any way, like what she had either feared, or hoped.

"Oh! do not, admirable Louisa! do not draw yourself away from me, as if you feared that I could do you injury by my too presumptuous approach! Alas! as yet, you have no reason to fear me. You know not, as yet, the wild tumult into which you have thrown my soul! Never, no never, did the tongue of woman or of angel recount a story so calculated to pierce to the very centre of a noble heart, and bind it in chains for ever!"

"Sir!" ejaculated the startled Miss Perkins, without, however, having the very slightest conception of what he meant.

"Ay—so it is I shall be treated by you! I already see, and feel it all," said Mr. Foxcroft, in a voice which seemed to indicate that his heart was nearly broken. "So it is I shall be treated! How, alas! can I expect it should be otherwise? How can I expect sympathy in feelings that can never be understood?"

"What DO you mean, sir?" cried Miss Louisa, squeezing herself up in the very furthest corner of the sofa, and looking at him very much, as if she thought he was going mad.

"Mean, Louisa,—what do I mean?" he replied, but in a tone so meek and gentle, as in a great degree to remove the personal terror of murder, "under the influence of temporary excitement," which from some recent readings of newspapers had not unnaturally occurred to her. "You ask me what I mean, my too, too charming friend! Alas! I have no words to answer you! For how can I make known—how, by any language used by man, can I hope to explain the vehement revulsion of feeling which has taken place in my very heart of hearts since first I entered this fatal room?"

"Fatal, Mr. Foxcroft? Fatal!" exclaimed poor Miss Louisa, all her fears returning at hearing a word which she understood perfectly, and knew to mean something about death. "Indeed, sir, I must beg that you will not speak to me in such a manner as that. I dare say you don't mean anything," she added, from a feeling of compunction, as she marked the exceedingly tame, not to say tender, expression of his eyes,—"but I am rather nervous, and you almost frightened me. However, I am quite sure you did not mean anything: so please to go on about Matilda, that I may let her know what you say."

"Not mean anything! Gracious heaven! what a fate is mine!" exclaimed the gentleman. "Oh Miss Perkins! cease, for pity's sake, cease to believe that in what I now say to you, I mean nothing. Be patient with me," he added, gently taking her hand. "Think not that I mean to offend, think not that I mean to frighten you; but, oh! Louisa, there is that within my heart at this moment which *must* destroy me if I conceal it, and which may cause you to look unkindly on me were it to be revealed. I could not bear this, Louisa!" he continued, speaking rapidly, and as if to prevent her prematurely answering him; "I *could* not bear it. One frown, one angry look from you, would send me from you a raving maniac,—or stretch me at your feet a corpse!"

"Dear me, Mr. Foxcroft! I am afraid you are a very hasty man, and that isn't what makes the best husband. But after all, sir, it is for my sister Matilda to decide, and not me. If you'll be pleased to say at once whether your purpose is to go on with your offer now you have been told all particulars about her fortune, I will let her know it, and then my looks won't have anything more to do with it." In truth, the looks of Miss Louisa, as she

uttered these words, were by no means so civil and so sweet as he had been used to see them; for she did not like the *passionate way* in which he talked, and could not help fearing that, determined as Matilda was to be married, it was not unlikely she might live to repent the not remaining single.

But Mr. Foxcroft either did not see, or did not heed her looks; for boldly passing his arm around her waist, he said, "I cannot leave you! I will not be banished thus harshly till at least I have made you know all that is passing in my heart. Let me tell you a story, sweet Louisa! and let me hear your own judgment on the facts I will lay before you. Will you listen to me, my gentle friend? Is this too much to ask?"

Miss Louisa was not used to being hugged, and she did not like it. She conceived it to be exceedingly coarse and ungenteel, even from a brother-in-law; but though very anxious to bring this puzzling interview to an end, she was so terrified at the idea that any rudeness on her part should send off Matilda's odd-tempered lover in a huff, that she very civilly said, "I will hear any story, Captain Foxcroft, that you will please to tell me; only you ought

to recollect that my sister Matilda must be in great suspense all this time, and so I think you ought to make it as short as you can: and besides, sir, I will be much obliged if you will please to take your arm away, because it makes me sit very uncomfortable."

Mr. Foxcroft withdrew his arm, while with the other he made a flourish in the air that ended by slapping his forehead in a manner which inferred great mental suffering, and then changing his place to a chair, which he drew to a point exactly opposite to the lady, he thus addressed her.

"There was once a man, doubtless with many faults, but formed by nature with a heart the most tender and the most true that ever beat within a human a breast. This man was thrown by fate into the society of two lovely, graceful, intellectual women, whose manners, marked by that peculiar tone of delicacy which his soul most loved, had for him a degree of captivation which he found it impossible to resist. He was a military man, and so wedded to his profession, that he long struggled against every thought of any other marriage, knowing, from having watched the same effect on others, that where the sword is not the only bride, the

steel-braced panoply of war is apt to gall the wearer. However," continued the gentleman, with a deep sigh, "his fate was busy with him, and all his most steadfast purposes seemed melting into air. Of these two enchanting sisters, there was one—the eldest—" and here another sigh impeded, for a moment, the fluent utterance,—"one—the eldest," he resumed, "who was formed in a mould which was the very model which nature had seemed to stamp on the imagination of this unhappy man as the pattern of all he was born to admire and to love. But he fancied he perceived a coldness towards him in her manner. He was not a presuming man; and this idea chilled all hope within him! He looked—he could have loved—but dared not—and turning for consolation to the softer-seeming younger sister, he met a degree of encouragement which led him to hope that if the ecstatic bliss of possessing her he adored was denied him, he might be soothed and lulled to peace and forgetfulness by one who in some degree resembled her. But woe to him who fancies he can play tricks with the mighty god of love, and juggle with him for felicity! Just at the very hour when the unhappy man had made up his mind to marry the younger sister,

such a glorious record of the heavenly-minded virtues and angelic high-mindedness of the elder was disclosed to him, that all his idle efforts not to love her fell, like the withered leaves from the sapless trees of autumn, and left him defenceless to endure the storm of irresistible passion that rushed upon his heart. A few agonizing moments of self-examination followed, but when these were over, the manly firmness of his mind returned. He felt that if from a mistaken sense of honour he should persevere, and become the husband of the younger sister, his rebellious heart would cause *her* misery, as well as his own; whereas if he could succeed in obtaining the elder, their days would flow in an endless circle of unceasing bliss, that might teach the very gods to envy!"

Here the orator paused, and gazed earnestly on the face of the lady he addressed, but not all his acuteness could avail to discover what she thought of him.

"Say, Louisa! speak!" he passionately resumed; "was this man wrong in acknowledging his unconquerable love, ere it was yet too late to save the charming younger sister from the dreadful fate of throwing herself away upon one who could not love her? Say, was he wrong?"

"Upon my word, Mr. Foxcroft, I am no very good judge of such matters, because they are quite out of my way," replied Miss Louisa. "But it seems to me, sir, that it was a pity the gentleman did not know his own mind sooner."

"And who think you was this erring man?" replied Foxcroft; "who think you was the angelic woman who had this power over him? Oh! Louisa!" he added, throwing himself on his knees before her, determined, as it seemed, to stake all on this bold *throw*, "oh! Louisa! it is yourself! Speak to me, adored Louisa! Tell me my fate in one soul-stirring word—Will you be my wife?"

The lady rose from her seat, and extricating her hands by a sudden jerk from the grasp of her lover, she slipped her thin person round the corner of a table that seemed to fasten her in, and reaching the door, laid her hand upon the lock; but before she opened it, she deliberately turned round, and faced the still prostrate gentleman, saying in a very quiet voice, "No, indeed, sir, I will not." Then making her exit, she entered the little bedroom behind, and found strength in her very honest indignation to recount to the palpitating

Faccanti's surprising declaration.

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Matilda this terrible termination of her love-affair.

In what way Mr. Foxcroft got out of the house was never known; but it is presumed that he opened the front door for himself very quietly, as the maid, when summoned to run out for two pennyworth of hartshorn, deposed that she had neither seen nor heard anything of him.

It is so very easy to guess all that Miss Matilda felt, and most of what she said, on this melancholy occasion, that it is unnecessary to describe it. One observation, however, which she made at the interval of some days after the scene above described, being more peculiarly her own, shall be repeated. Feeling herself totally unable to face her gay and blooming friend in Curzon-street, the willow-wearing Matilda had confined herself entirely to the house for four days, saying little on the subject to her sister, with whom, for some reason or other, she did not appear to be well pleased, and appearing to find more consolation in darning a quantity of old stockings, than in anything else. On the fifth day Patty and her page set off upon a voyage of discovery, and despite the reluctance of the fair sufferer to

enter upon the history of her disappointment, her young friend persevered in her affectionate inquiries till she had got at the fact that Mr. Foxcroft feared they should not be able to make up enough between them to live upon comfortably.

Of the transition of his affections to her sister, she said nothing, having extracted from Louisa, who felt a good deal ashamed of the whole affair, a willing promise never to mention it to any body. Having listened to this valedictory piece of prudence, Patty indulged in some strong language expressive of her indignation at what she called such "dirty falseheartedness," and declared that she was very sure there never had been such an abominable thing done before, since marriage was invented between Adam and Eve in Paradise. "But," she added, with much practical good sense, "there is no use in your breaking your heart, you know, because he is a rogue and a villain, and if I was you, Matilda, I'd make love before his very eyes, with the first man that was in the humour for it."

"And so I would, my dear," replied Matilda, roused by this agreeable project of revenge into a more lively frame of mind than she had

enjoyed since her misfortune; "only it is so monstrous disagreeable to have the same thing happen over and over again."

"I am sure that's nonsense, Matilda, for it isn't very likely that such a queer thing should happen twice to the same person. However, to make that safe, I would always take care that every body should know exactly how much I had got—and then you know there can't be any mistake. And I'll tell you what, my dear, 'tis as clear as light that papa means to have lots of men coming of an evening just as he did at Brighton, you know, and we shall have capital fun again, if you'll only snap your fingers at Foxcroft, as I shall do at Sir Jack, if he does not choose to come round again, nasty, cold-hearted, ungrateful fellow! But you don't suppose I mean to put my finger in my eye as if there wasn't another man in the world? Not I, Matilda, take my word for it. But now I must go—for mama has found out some old lord that she knows, and she expects him to call to-day, so she insisted upon it that I should come back to be shown off. Cheer up, my dear, and I'll find plenty of beaux for you, never fear."

With this comforting assurance Patty de-

parted, and the two sisters were left alone to meditate upon her words.

"Sweet kind-hearted creature she is, to be sure!" said Miss Matilda, after a silence of some minutes; "it is quite impossible not to love her!—and I am quite sure she is right too, about me. She is an uncommonly sharp girl, for her age, and catches things quicker than any body I ever saw. That about letting every body know, was excessively clever of her. Don't you think it was, Louisa?

"Letting every body know about your only having five hundred pounds, Matilda? Why I am sure if the doing it would prevent any more such horrid adventures, I should think it *was* the best thing that could be done. Only, my dear, I don't think it would answer about your getting married, which I am afraid you have still got in your head. Don't you think, my dear, that perhaps after all the best thing would be to give it up altogether? I am sure it would save you a deal of trouble and vexation, Matilda."

Poor Miss Perkins was almost terrified when she perceived, by the heightened complexion of her sister, how very distasteful this proposed improvement of their plans was likely to be.

"I wish, Louisa, that you were not always forgetting the enormous difference in our ages," she replied tartly. "It is all very well for you to talk of making up your mind against marriage, but you must please to recollect that it may not be quite so easy for me. When I find myself noticed like other young women, I should like to know how I am to help thinking about marriage? I am sure it is very shocking, and very wicked, *not* to be thinking about marriage when people are making downright love to one. What would you have me think about, I wonder?"

"Well, my dear, I dare say you know best," returned the unresisting Louisa. "And God knows that my first wish is that you should be made happy and contented, if I did but know how to bring it about."

"You *could* bring it about, Louisa, easy enough, if you really wished it," replied the younger sister.

"Good gracious! how, Matilda?" returned the elder one. "I am sure I never in my life did anything to stop your getting married, whatever I might think about it in my own heart."

"I did not say you did," replied Matilda, in

the sharp tone to which her quiet senior was a little too much accustomed. "But there is a great difference, you know, between not stopping a match, and doing something sisterly to help it on."

"But what *can* I do, Matilda? Nobody would marry you a bit the more for my telling them to do it."

"But there *is* a way, Louisa, that if you would put it in practice, would take me off your hands in no time."

"Is there? Then I wish you would tell me what it is, my dear. Not that I want to get you off my hands, Matilda; I am sure I love you very dearly indeed, but certainly it would make me a deal happier if I could see you easy in your mind," said the kind lady, with something very like tears in her eyes.

"Can you have any doubt, Louisa, after all you have seen and heard, that if you were to make over to me half your fortune—only half, mind—I should find husbands enough ready to marry me?" said Matilda, in rather a bitter accent.

"Indeed, I am afraid you might find plenty, my dear."

"Afraid! What do you mean by afraid?

Isn't that cruel, savagely cruel, when you know it is the first wish of my heart?"

"But surely, Matilda, it cannot be the first wish of your heart to have a husband that could be bought for 2575*l.* 10*s.*, which is just half of what I stand for in the stocks."

"It is very easy, Louisa, to turn the most serious things into ridicule. And as to what I would, and what I would not do, I must certainly be old enough to decide for myself. I am the best judge of what is for my own happiness. It is no good now, to dispute about that—I have made up my mind to ask you, Louisa, and now I do it, in an honest straightforward manner—Will you let me tell Mrs. O'Donagough, who is truly a friend to both of us, and would take care to make proper use of the information, will you let me tell her, Louisa, that my fortune is rather more than three thousand pounds,—because of my own five hundred, you know?"

"I don't believe, Matilda," replied Miss Perkins very gently, "that I could prevent your telling Mrs. O'Donagough anything you liked. But as to the thing itself, it is certainly what I do not intend to do."

On receiving this definitive answer, the in-

dignant Matilda suddenly made a large roll of her rather untidy-looking work, and thrusting it under the sofa, left the room.

"Poor thing!" murmured Louisa, as she shut the door, which had been banged, but not closed. "Poor thing!—she shall have it all when I die. But God forbid I should spend 2575*l.* 10*s.* to buy such a man as Captain Foxcroft for her, and she still so well-looking, as she says—I am sure it would be very wicked if I did."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF MR. ALLEN O'DONAGOUGH AND MR. FOXCROFT RIPENS INTO CONFIDENCE—MRS. ALLEN O'DONAGOUGH ENJOYS THE GRATIFICATION OF RECEIVING A VISIT FROM AN OLD FRIEND—HER PREPARATIONS FOR IT, AND THEIR PERFECT SUCCESS—HER HUSBAND AND DAUGHTER ARE INTRODUCED TO LORD MUCKLEBURY.

"No go, my dear fellow!—I must find out some other scheme," said Mr. Foxcroft, in a bravado sort of tone, as he entered with a swing into the sanctum of Mr. O'Donagough's library, "Matilda Perkins has absolutely nothing."

"Then how the devil do they contrive to live?" demanded Mr. O'Donagough, knitting his brows with an expression that was by no means conciliatory.

"The money all belongs to the old one," replied his friend.

"All! Then, Foxcroft, you may make just

twice as good a thing of it as you hoped to do. Contrive to pick a quarrel with the youngest; turn about and fall in love with the eldest, and you will exactly find yourself master of all, instead of half. I presume you are not very particular as to which of the two ladies you get with it?"

"No, not I. But I am not quite such a fool as you seem to take me for, O'Donagough. I had wit enough to hit upon that scheme myself, and I tried it too, in pretty tolerable good style, I can tell you. But I might just as well make love to your iron coal-box there as to the old one. Egad, I never saw such a cold-blooded old jade in the whole course of my life. She listened very quietly, but with just about as much sensibility as a post; and the real truth is, that women never *do* listen to love-making when they have got money, in the same way as when they have not."

"That is very likely, Mr. Foxcroft, and probably your own experience has suggested the observation; but I must beg leave to observe that it affords vastly little comfort to me, under my extremely inconvenient disappointment. I should be sorry to press any gentleman uncivilly; but you must be aware, sir, that affairs of this kind are very peculiar as to their

immediate consequences. My name has just been put down by Sir Henry Seymour at two of the first-rate clubs, and you must know that it will be impossible for me to permit our acquaintance to continue under circumstances, excuse me, Mr. Foxcroft, so very disgraceful."

This was listened to with a wonderful degree of gentleness and equanimity, not a shadow of anger appearing on the long-visaged countenance of the ex-lieutenant.

"True, O'Donagough, true as gospel!" he replied, "and if bleeding me could pay the money, upon my soul I'd hold out my arm for the operation. But what on earth can I do, my dear sir? I have never gone out of the gentlemanlike line yet, and I should be monstrous sorry to do it, because you know it is so devilish hard to get up again. But if there is nothing else for it, I suppose I must e'en submit, and get enrolled among some set of regular equalizers of property. God knows I would do anything rather than not settle my account with you."

"Well, sir, that is feeling and speaking exceedingly like a gentleman; and I beg to say in return that no man would be more unwilling than myself to harass a man of honour, under

such circumstances. But the fact is, Foxcroft, and you know it very well, that if this transaction between us is not closed, and settled, you are, in point of fact, placed quite beyond my power to help you. I know, therefore, but of one mode by which I can prove how sincerely I still feel myself your friend, but this mode I cannot adopt without placing a degree of confidence in you which the length of our acquaintance, perhaps, hardly warrants. Professions at such a moment, we all know, come easily, and therefore if I consent to return the I O U which I hold, it must be done upon condition of your immediately giving me *proof* that you are ready to go all lengths to deserve it."

"Name your proofs, O'Donagough!" exclaimed Mr. Foxcroft eagerly, and with the refreshed aspect of a man to whose parched and despairing lips the revivifying cup of hope is once more offered; "name your proofs, and if I shrink from them, proclaim what has passed in every gaming-house in London."

"Foxcroft!" replied Mr. O'Donagough, with a very unusual degree of solemnity, "I will speak to you with the most perfect sincerity. The truth is, that in order to carry out the

purpose I have in view, I must trust *somebody*, and it is obvious, my good friend, that the most eligible person upon whom such confidence can be reposed, must be one whose reputation is in my power. This, to a man of your capacity and clear comprehension, is preface enough; and I shall therefore proceed at once to state what I shall require of you. The *proofs* to which I have alluded, will be given on your part by the skill and the will with which I shall see you conduct yourself on the first occasion that they may be called for."

No hungry dog, waiting with watery mouth for the scraps expected to fall from his master's hand, ever fixed his eye upon that master with sharper eagerness than Mr. Foxcroft now did upon the face of Mr. O'Donagough.

"You may well look anxious to listen to me, my good fellow," resumed the master of the house, with a benignant smile, "for if I do not greatly miscalculate, a much finer career is at this moment about to open before you, than you can ever have hoped for, during the whole course of your existence. In my younger days, Foxcroft, I was once fortunate enough to pass a season in Paris under very favourable auspices. The wig which it suits me to wear now, my

good fellow, may perhaps render it rather difficult for you to believe what a capital good-looking, dashing blade I was, some five and twenty years ago. This helped me very greatly. I had one exceedingly serviceable introduction, and the rest of my good fortune grew out of it. In short, I had the *entrée* to some of the best houses in Paris, by which, as I presume you will conjecture, I do not mean the mansions either of the richest, the highest-born, or the most illustrious, in any of the ordinary and old-fashioned senses of the word. But in its way, the society I was thrown amongst was perfect, and I do not believe that even yet, there are many houses in London which receive exactly on the same principle as those of which I speak in Paris. In the first place, high play is here almost entirely confined to the clubs; an exceedingly clumsy way of using an exceedingly good thing. Of the immense advantage and utility of these gambling clubs to society, of course nobody in their senses can doubt; nevertheless, there are many little peculiarities of play among many very fashionable, and highly-distinguished men, which render the variety afforded by meeting quite young players in a private drawing-room, extremely convenient and agreeable.

"Of such drawing-rooms, Foxcroft, there are abundance in Paris, and I am determined that there shall at last be one here. How it will answer, of course remains to be proved; but in this, as in every other experiment, almost every thing depends upon the style and manner in which it is made. One essential feature in the scheme, and one, as you will believe, never lost sight of in Paris, is the obtaining by some means or other such a sprinkling of *really* good company, according to common vulgar parlance I mean, as may act as a decoy, or rather as an authority for the presence of such tyros as are at once, perhaps, the most difficult to lay hold of, and the most valuable when caught. In this respect I am very peculiarly well situated, and, indeed, I question whether without this advantage I should have ever ventured upon the scheme at all. My wife's connections are, as you know, of a class that renders the presence of any of them, a guarantee for the perfect respectability and *bon ton* of the *salon* in which they are seen, and though General Hubert and his family are at this moment abroad, Frederic Stephenson, a much more manageable person, by the way, than the stiff-backed General, comes to town immediately

after Christmas, and will, I feel no doubt, extend to me exactly the sort of protection I want, and that, too, without having the slightest consciousness that he is doing it. There is a certain nobleman, also, an old crony of my wife's, who is already in town, and has promised to visit her. I have inquired about him, and find he is the very man for us—sufficiently easy and liberal-minded to go wherever he can be amused, yet not at all permitting himself to drop out of good society. The two men you met here the other day at dinner, are, each of them in his respective way, highly valuable. Armondyle is one of the best and most gentlemanly players in London, and Seymour, as I am told, about the richest *quite* uncontrolled young man about town. Of course, if I get into the clubs, my list will rapidly increase; but you must be aware, my good friend, that let me get who I will here, nothing effectual, nothing *masterly*, can be done without a coadjutator. You understand me. Are you willing to become such?"

With the air of a hero, about to pledge his untarnished faith to the maintenance of some noble enterprise, Mr. Foxcroft held out his hand, and solemnly received that of O'Dona-

gough in its grasp. "Let me hold this station near you, my most valued friend," he said, "and never shall you repent the choice. You have probably perceived something in my manners, and in my character, which has led you to believe that I am not altogether unworthy of, or unfitted for, this situation; and without unseemly boasting, I may venture to say that you are not deceived. I am conscious that I may have many things against me, but, nevertheless, I am conscious also, that I possess both faculties and qualities, which peculiarly fit me for the task. The outline of your scheme is distinctly clear before me; the filling up must, of course, depend both upon circumstances, and your own individual inclinations. You have mentioned Sir Henry Seymour, for instance, and there can be no doubt in the world that he is quite a first-rate man to obtain as a frequenter of your *salon*. But, between friends, I should have thought that you had other projects for him. I have a great notion that your beautiful Patty has a fancy for him, and it would be a capital match, O'Donagough. However, that's your concern, not mine. I can have no objection to your throwing open the preserve, as it were, and letting us share,

and share alike, if you think *that* a more profitable scheme than the other."

"Why, I am not sure that I should, Foxcroft, if that other were fairly in my hands to take or to leave; but I doubt it. I know perfectly well that the young fellow has been devilish sweet upon her, and that the poor little soul is over head and ears in love with him; but I strongly suspect that he never thought seriously about her, and that he has only been amusing himself by turning her young head for pure fun,—a suspicion, as you will readily believe, not very likely to make me spare him at the board of green cloth. I have a hold upon him too, upon which it is not necessary to enter now, that I think will keep him effectually within my reach, and, as he will serve me both as a decoy duck, and a pigeon, I mean, remember, in *all* ways to cultivate his acquaintance, and stand well in his eyes."

"It shall not be by fault of mine if you do not," replied the faithful associate; and presently added, with the air of one who was making a very shrewd remark, "By the way O'Donagough, that daughter of yours is a charming creature, and will count for something,

you may depend upon it, among the attractions of your drawing-room."

"That is exactly what I have been thinking myself, Foxcroft; and to say the truth, I am not altogether sorry that there is no chance of her being caught up by this Sir Henry immediately. She is very handsome—I never saw finer eyes in my life; and when she is a little more used to company, she will tell more in a drawing-room than she does now. I own that I wish her mother was not quite so large,—she would be an exceedingly fine woman still, if it were not for that. Just such a looking woman as she was, when I first knew her, is the very best partner a man can have in such a concern as we have been speaking of. She has a great deal of talent, however, and I have no doubt will do exceedingly well."

"There can, indeed, be no doubt of that," replied Mr. Foxcroft impressively; "and now, my dear friend," he continued, "let us come to particulars. Let me understand exactly your projects, your expectations, your arrangements. It is impossible to doubt for a moment your liberality; but in a business of this kind it is as absolutely necessary that everything should be openly expressed between the asso-

ciates, as that nothing should be openly expressed beyond them. Here is pen and ink. Give me leave to set down from your own lips, precisely the terms on which you propose that we should carry on together this admirably-imagined scheme. Yet imagine not from the phrase, *carry on together*, that I have any notion of a perfect equality as to the division of what may result from it; nothing like it, I assure you. I am perfectly aware that your stake is greater, not to mention that the merit, all the merit, of originating the plan is your own. I say this, that you may understand at once the fair and gentlemanly feeling with which I am desirous to proceed. And now, my dear O'Donagough, for particulars."

* * * * *

While this conversation was going on in the library, a scene almost equally interesting, was passing in the drawing-room. Mr. O'Donagough having learnt, by some means or other, that his lady's former admirer, and what was more important as a trait of character, the magnificent donor of her shell necklace, was in town, proposed, with what she sensibly felt to be a very generous freedom from all narrow-minded jealousy, to take some active measures

towards the renewal of an acquaintance from which, as she freely confessed, she had derived much pleasure.

"But not for the world, my dear Donny," she said, on his proposing this, "not for the world would I wish Lord Mucklebury to visit here, if his doing so would give you uneasiness. I will not deny, I never have denied, that at the time we parted, I regretted the unfortunate entanglement abroad, which obliged him to leave me. But subsequent events have, of course, reconciled me to this early disappointment, and I feel that I could see him now and introduce him to my husband and my child, without experiencing any emotion whatever, beyond what the purest friendship may authorize."

"Very well, then, my dear," Mr. O'Donagough had replied, "that being the case, you shall sit down and write a note to him immediately, just saying, you know, that you should like to return your personal thanks for his having so kindly thought of you in the city of the Cæsars, or something of that kind, which shall look light and playful;—you understand?"

"Oh! perfectly!" she replied, and this light and playful billet produced an answer from the

still laughter-loving nobleman, which perfectly satisfied Mr. O'Donagough, and caused a very animating and youthful sort of flutter to pervade the entire frame of his sensitive wife.

It was exactly at the time that Mr. O'Donagough was the most earnestly engaged with Mr. Foxcroft in the conversation that has been given above, that Lord Mucklebury made his *entrée* into the drawing-room of his umquhile Barnaby. His lordship's note in promising this visit, had said, "Lord Mucklebury will take an early opportunity," and accordingly Mrs. O'Donagough had sat in state in her fine drawing-room every morning since, from mid-day to the hour of dinner, attired with a degree of captivating elegance which it had cost her some hours of meditation to devise. Her great object was to look as nearly as possible like what she had been some eighteen years before, when his lordship had made her poor heart leap like a porpoise after a storm, by addressing her as "*Mia Barnabbia!*" In unfading ringlets, and unfading rouge, she had great confidence, and her eyes too, she thought had stood the test of time with almost unfading brightness. But she could not, poor lady! conceal from herself the disagreeable fact that of late years

she had become what friends call *en bon point*, and unfriends, corpulent. She felt, alas! that she was unwieldy; and that the majestic *charpente*, which had formerly assisted so *largely* (a villanous pun of Mr. O'Donagough's) in obtaining for her the epithet of "a prodigious fine woman," was become by the gradual increase of its fleshy clothing of a size by no means easy to dress gracefully. Of this she was, if not wholly, at least, in a great degree, conscious; and to neutralize the effects of this substantial impediment to beauty, she had for many days been occupied (but, unlike her general habit, silently occupied) on meditating the form and material of the dress in which she should for the first time re-appear before the eyes of Lord Mucklebury.

The reader need hardly be told at this stage of her history, that Mrs. O'Donagough's mind was one of no common order. If it had been, she would, beyond all question, have had recourse in this emergency to the ordinary and every-way vulgar operation of tight lacing. But Mrs. O'Donagough knew better. She knew perfectly well, that though it may be possible to transfer matter, it is beyond human power to annihilate it, and although under the

circumstances she might have been tempted to exclaim,

> Oh! that this too, too solid flesh would melt!

she never for a moment was guilty of the folly of hoping that she might be able to make away with it. With this right-minded conviction fully impressed upon her, she gave herself to the study of her toilette, not with the vain hope of lessening her circumference, but with the rational intention of rendering it as little conspicuous as possible. "The general outline," thought she, "must be indistinct. A sort of floating maze of drapery ought to envelop such a form as mine, in which the eye cannot justly determine where the natural material ends, and that of the dress begins—a sort of vapoury, misty, decoration should fall around the shoulders, from among which the still-handsome face should appear, like that charming portrait that I made Donny stop to look at the other day, where a beautiful head seemed peeping at us through a cloud."

Inspired by this idea, the skilful lady set to work, and while Patty and the page were taking their daily exercise round and round the pavement of Berkeley Square, she con-

trived to fabricate a dress, the capes, sleeves, flounces, and furbelows of which seemed to wander, and fall, and undulate, and rise again, till, according to her ingenious intention, it would have been difficult for the most accurate eye to detect the points where the lady ended, and her dress began.

It was thus that she received Lord Mucklebury; and had she not been already fully satisfied with the result of her own labours, and convinced that, however enormously large she might be, it was not at all likely that anybody would observe it, the sight of his lordship would at once have removed from her mind every feeling of alarm, lest HE, at least, should remark invidiously upon her increased bulk—for he had himself, like Father Philip, "prospered marvellously" since he had last presented his portly person before the admiring eyes of our heroine. It was, indeed, evident that he had taken leave of his own shoe-strings for ever, by reason of the intervening paunch, while his jocund cheeks spread widely, and unrestrainedly, over the cravat that formerly sustained them. But nevertheless, Mrs. O'Donagough thought him almost as charming as ever; and when, with both arms put forward to their utmost length,

which just enabled the hands to reach beyond the "capon-lined" rotundity of his goodly person, he seized cordially upon each of hers, and, bending himself forward, contrived, notwithstanding all impediments, to salute her cheek, she was unconscious of any alteration, but for the better.

Let it not, however, be supposed for an instant that Mrs. O'Donagough's feelings were such as Mr. O'Donagough could have disapproved; nothing could be more cruelly unjust than such a suspicion. It was the noble nature, as well as the noble birth, of the amiable peer, which warmed her heart towards him, and which made her feel, more strongly than ever, the immense advantage of such talents and manners as her own, which had enabled her to secure for years, as she subsequently observed to her husband and daughter, the affectionate attachment of a nobleman, whose early feelings for her were of a kind which rarely produced such an after-growth of admiration and esteem.

"I rejoice, my dear madam," said the peer, "to see you looking so charmingly after your long absence,—*Pel corpo di Bacco!*—I hope you have not forgotten your Italian? *Pel corpo di Bacco!* you have not lost anything since we

parted last. Nor have you gained too much, no, not an atom too much! You are charming, charming, ever! *sempre bellissima!*"

"This is, indeed, a most gratifying favour, my dear lord!" replied the fascinated, and fascinating lady, "I cannot thank you enough for it! Oh! my lord! after an expatriation of so many years, it is inexpressibly soothing to a heart like mine, to find that those whom my judgment taught me most to value, and my taste to admire ere I left my native land, are ready to receive me with a friendly greeting on my return to it."

"The very same! The very same as ever!" exclaimed Lord Mucklebury in great delight. "If I were to live a thousand years, my dear Mrs. Barnaby, while I remembered anything, I should remember you!"

"Oh Lord Mucklebury! It would, indeed, be strange if feelings such as yours were not reciprocal! But, my kind friend, forgive me if I remind you that you must no longer call me Barnaby. Ah! my dear lord! the heart of a woman is destined from her birth to pant for an answering heart! To feelings like mine, the chill solitude of widowed loneliness was intolerable, and though it is denied to us to—

to—forgive me! I know not where my foolish memory would lead me! Suffice it to say, my lord, that soon after my last hurried interview with your lordship, which, as you will remember, I sought for the purpose of giving you the little commission you so generously executed afterwards—soon after that, I discovered, even before I could understand how the thing could be, that I was adored by a man endowed with a thousand fine qualities. After a while—after a little struggle with myself to forget former feelings, I yielded to his wishes, and my name is now O'Donagough."

"By sun and moon I swear," exclaimed Lord Mucklebury, drawing forth a cambric handkerchief richly scented, and indulging the lower part of his face by its near neighbourhood, "by sun and moon I sware, that never, since I saw you last, have I met any human being that could equal you, most exquisite Mrs. O'Donagough! God forbid that your amiable husband should be jealous, madam! Ease my heart at once, is this likely to be the case?"

"Oh no! my lord," replied Mrs. O'Donagough, with expressive emphasis, and a smile that seemed to say, "He knows my unconquerable virtue too well," "oh no! my lord,

not the least jealous, and it will give me more satisfaction than I can easily express, if your lordship will allow me to have the honour of introducing him."

"Permit you? Adorable Mrs. O'Donagough, it will be like opening to me the gates of paradise. Upon the honour of a peer," continued Lord Mucklebury, laying his hand as near his heart as the circumjacent solidities would permit, "upon the honour of a peer I protest to you that an *entrée* to your mansion, is at this moment what I most greatly covet, and I shall be only too happy if Mr. O'Donagough will permit me to make his acquaintance. Perhaps, too, *Madonna delectissima!* you will suffer me, for the sake of our long friendship, to present my son to you? I do pledge you my word that he deserves the honour, for he inherits enough of his father's spirit to enjoy it."

"My dearest lord! your condescending kindness overpowers me! I, too, have a young creature, my only surviving child, a girl, my lord, whom I should feel a mother's pride in showing to you; she has been thought extremely like me—I know not if it be so. On this point, my dear lord, you must judge for yourself."

"And so I will, charming Mrs. O'Donagough. But if I find it so, may the gods protect me! I know not what is to become of my heart. O'Donagough! O'Donagough!" repeated the happy-looking nobleman, with an air of great enjoyment, "may I die, madam, if I do not even admire your name. I used to think your former one the most euphonious in the world, because it softened so sweetly into Barnabbia; you know of old my passion for the *dolce lingua*. But methinks O'Donagough will undergo the same delicious process as well. May I not now call you *la mia magnifica O'Donnaccia?*"

His lordship paused for a moment, half-frightened at his own audacity, as he remembered that it was just possible his charming old friend might know enough of the language of which she used to proclaim "her idolatry," to comprehend the "delicious process" rather too well; but the charming smile with which she listened to him, soon removed his doubts, and he remained convinced that, by whatever name he might choose to call her, she was, and ever must be, the most invaluable addition to his acquaintance that he could ever hope to make.

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Interview between Lord Muckleberry and his "Magnifica O Donnaccia"

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Their *tête-à-tête*, however, was soon brought to a conclusion by the rather boisterous entrance of Patty on her return from her visit to the Miss Perkinses.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Donagough, "here is my child! my only surviving child, my dear lord! permit me to present her to your lordship." And so saying, she rose up in all her greatness, moral and physical, or, in plainer English, in all the flutter of expansive drapery and excited spirits, and throwing one of her arms round the person of her daughter, brought her close before the eyes of the admiring peer. Lord Mucklebury did not rise, for which his corpulency must be pleaded as an excuse, but he received the radiant young lady with a smile, and, after looking at her for a moment, drew her towards him by the hand that had been placed in his, and kissed her.

The words Lord and Lordship had sufficed to enlighten Patty as to the identity of the *great* personage who thus honoured her. She knew it must be her mama's often-quoted dear friend, Lord Mucklebury; and therefore, though under other circumstances it is possible that she might not have felt particularly grateful for the salute, she now took it in very good part, and

even grinned a little as she withdrew herself with a curtsy from before the condescending nobleman.

"An extremely fine young lady, indeed!" said his lordship, "and a most charming likeness of her mama!"

"You find her like me, my lord?" said Mrs. O'Donagough, in an accent of great tenderness. "Ah! my dear lord! no mother can ever hear that without pleasure!"

"Upon my honour, madam," replied his lordship, again spreading his hand upon his breast, "it is impossible in this instance to say whether mother or daughter ought to feel the most flattered by hearing of the resemblance. This young lady, all blooming as she is, may feel perfectly assured that her mother bloomed as brilliantly before her, and that charming mother herself, while looking on the prodigiously fine young creature to whom she has given birth, may smile with two-fold rapture, conscious that she is gazing at once upon herself, and child."

This fine speech rather astonished Patty, and she opened her great eyes, and gave her mother a look that seemed to say so. But Mrs. O'Donagough, with her usual happy presence

of mind, converted this somewhat impertinent stare into a compliment, by saying,—

"Ah, my Patty! How well I understand that look! you are quite right, dearest! My darling girl is peculiarly alive to the charm of graceful manners, my dear lord, and sweet creature! she is too young to disguise what she feels."

"Sweet creature! sweet creatures both!" cried Lord Mucklebury, with great enthusiasm.

"Well dearest?" said Mrs. O'Donagough, playfully untying her daughter's bonnet, and arranging the multitudinous ringlets of her black hair,—"And how did you leave our friends?"

"Oh lor!—There's a fine kettle of fish there, mama," replied the young lady. "Matilda is in *such* a way!"

"Well, well, love; we'll hear all that by-and-bye. It is such an affectionate young heart my lord! Where she attaches herself, the slightest circumstances appear to her of consequence."

"I hope, my dear madam," replied his lordship, "that she will speedily both feel and inspire precisely the attachment which may be most agreeable to you, and herself too."

Patty replied to this with a toss which seemed

to say that all that had happened already; but her mother shook her head, and waved her hand, as if she deprecated the awful thought.

"Alas!" she exclaimed, "she is a child, my lord!" Then abruptly turning to the young lady, she said, "Go, my love, go and find your father; he is in the library, I believe. Tell him that the valued friend he has so often heard me mention—tell him—that Lord Mucklebury is here!"

Patty left the room, and Mrs. O'Donagough lowering her voice, which lisped a little, as was usual with her, when in full glory, said,—

"My dear lord, your suggestion, which goes to my very heart from the interest it evinces in the welfare of my child, your suggestion, my dear lord, induces me to communicate to your friendly ear a circumstance which must, for the present, be secret from the world. My sweet girl has already, child as she is, inspired and conceived the attachment of which your lordship speaks, and the connexion is so desirable, that we do not think we should be justifiable in interfering to prevent it, merely on account of her youth. My darling Patty is engaged to Sir Henry Seymour."

"Engaged to Sir Henry Seymour?" repeated

Lord Mucklebury, interrogatively, and with a look of considerable surprise; "Do you mean Sir Henry Seymour, of Hartley Hall?"

"Yes!" replied the undaunted Mrs. O'Donagough, "that is the name of one of his places; he is a ward of a near connexion of mine, Sir Edward Stephenson."

"Certainly, Sir Henry Seymour is, or rather was, his ward: but I did not know, my dear Mrs. Barnaby—I beg your pardon—your present name often escapes me, I did not know that you were related to Sir Edward Stephenson."

"Not exactly *related*, my lord, but nearly connected; Lady Stephenson's brother, General Hubert, is my nephew by marriage."

"General Hubert your nephew, my dear madam!" exclaimed the peer with inexpressible astonishment, "upon my honour, I had no idea of it."

"It is even so, my lord," replied the lady, a little piqued, perhaps, at the surprise so freely shown, but greatly pleased at the sort of *coup de théâtre* effect of the discovery.

While this interesting communication was making in the drawing-room, Patty had made her way into the library, where she found her father and Foxcroft in very close consultation.

"So *you* are here, are you?" said Patty, addressing the ex-lieutenant, and accompanying the question with a very scornful grimace, that did honour to the courageous firmness of her friendship for the unhappy Matilda. "You'll find these quarters too hot for you, Mr. Captain, if I don't much mistake," she added, "for you may depend upon it I am not going to give up having my own particular friend, Matilda Perkins, here—and I should be happy to know what you would think of meeting her?'

"I do assure you, my dear young lady, I should not feel the least objection in the world to meeting your amiable friend, and she must have altogether mistaken my motives, if she attributes anything to me which ought to occasion any coolness between us. Unhappily my income is insufficient to permit my marrying a lady without fortune, however charming she may be; but however much this may be a matter of regret on my side, it surely ought not to be a matter of resentment on hers."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" replied Patty, turning her back upon him, and addressing her father. "I say pap,' said she, "there is my Lord Muckle something or other up stairs. It is mama's great friend, you know, that she is so often

crowing about, and you must come up this very minute, whether you like it or not."

"Is that the message that your mother sent to me, Patty?" demanded Mr. O'Donagough.

"My eye, no papa! Mama's as soft and as sweet as the flowers in May, now that she has got this Lord Muckle with her, so come along."

"And so I will, Patty; but you must shake hands with Foxcroft first."

"I had rather shake hands with a toad, than with a false-hearted lover," said Patty.

"Don't stand there, talking stuff to me," replied her father, with the aspect that always won belief as to his being in earnest. So Patty shook hands with Mr. Foxcroft, who then took his departure, but she relieved her feelings by performing sundry grimaces to her father's back as she followed him up the stairs.

Nothing could be better than the style in which Mr. O'Donagough permitted himself to be presented to the gay old nobleman, and the few minutes of conversation which followed between them, left exactly the impression on his lordship's mind which he intended; namely, that Mr. O'Donagough was certainly a very decent sort of person, though he had such a queer wife.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SLIGHT AND RAPID SKETCH OF MR. ALLEN O'DONAGOUGH'S SUCCESSFUL SCHEMES FOR INCREASING HIS ACQUAINTANCE—THE HEART OF PATTY HARDENS ITSELF TOWARDS JACK—THE HUBERT FAMILY RETURN TO BERKELEY SQUARE, AND ARE VISITED BY THEIR RELATIONS—MORE OLD FRIENDS.

We must not linger to watch every circumstance by which Mr. O'Donagough was led, or rather, by which he led himself, into precisely the position which he desired to fill in the motley mosaic of London society. He kept his Parisian model well in view, and well too did he manage all the turnings and windings, the sketchings and shadings necessary to the production of a perfect copy. During the two years that General Hubert's family remained abroad, he and his lady between them, had contrived to make a circle of acquaintance the most heterogeneous, perhaps, that ever met together in a London drawing-room, which,

on the score of variety, is saying a good deal for it.

More, perhaps, for the purpose of maintaining his influence over Sir Henry Seymour, by showing how easy it was for him to betray the foolish secret which the young man so pertinaciously desired to keep, than for any particular wish for their society, Mr. O'Donagough had taken especial pains to make the acquaintance of Sir Edward and Lady Stephenson; an ambitious project in which he was greatly assisted by the gentle Lady Stephenson's wish not to appear proud or repulsive to the near relations of her dear sister Agnes. The gay and wealthy Frederic too, and not a few more of an equally elevated station in society, were frequently not displeased at finding card-tables and high stakes in a private drawing-room, though he, and they too, might have felt considerable repugnance to having their names quoted as frequenters of gaming clubs.

Lord Mucklebury, and his free-and-easy son also, not unfrequently amused themselves in the receiving rooms of Curzon Street, while Sir Henry Seymour, seeing the statements of O'Donagough respecting his family connexion with the Huberts and Stephensons so fully

proved, fell completely into the snare that was laid for him, and little as he liked his society, became the frequent guest of the man whose feelings of friendly good will were so extremely important to him. Happy, indeed, did he often think himself at being able, at the risk of losing his money, perhaps, but with the certainty of enjoying an excellent rubber, to escape from the affectionate friendship of Mrs. O'Donagough, and the still more oppressive coquetries of her daughter. A multitude of others, whose names are of no importance to the narrative, were also gradually added to the O'Donagough list of acquaintance, till, by degrees, their *soirées* became actually crowded, while the quiet master of the mansion kept his station with great constancy in the small third room, with his faithful Foxcroft ever hovering near him, but his *partie de jeu* varying as occasion required. The *great game* he was playing at this time, without referring to any particular stakes, whether at whist or piquet, was too important to permit any considerations of minor economy to interfere with it. His rooms were splendidly lighted; strong coffee, excellent liqueurs, and abundant ices, were freely distributed; and though Mrs. O'Donagough, in the

ecstasy of finding herself so immensely important a personage, did sometimes exceed both in dress and demeanour the ordinary bounds of sober elegance, yet, on the whole, she was by no means an inefficient partner in the concern. She was indefatigable in her efforts to increase her circle of acquaintance, and what with her handsome house, showy carriage, magnificent dress, and universally recognised auntship to Mrs. General Hubert, these efforts were more successful than those who knew Mrs. O'Donagough best, would have deemed possible. Her watchful husband, therefore, was, on the whole, exceedingly well contented, and still continued to think that "his Barnaby" was as well qualified to fill the splendid station in which her good fortune had placed her, as any lady he knew. Not that he was blind to the species of gratification enjoyed in her society by Lord Mucklebury, his son, and some others of the same stamp; but as he perceived that many of

> Those who came to laugh, remained to *play*,

he understood what he was about too well to quarrel with any of them.

In this manner, and with a degree of success

which soon removed from his own mind every fear lest his bold project should fail, Mr. O'Donagough went on with a steady, quiet, unruffled, exterior of respectability, which very effectually concealed all that it was necessary for his interest should be hidden.

Few, or rather none of those who were not professionally interested in the fact, were aware *how* deep were the stakes nightly played for in Mr. O'Donagough's drawing-room. For if it happened that some rich, but luckless novice became a victim, the lamented adventure was always made to appear as something purely accidental, as to its extent, and merely the consequence of the temporary excitement of the parties which "really was very foolish, and must not happen again."

Such was the prosperous state of the O'Donagough affairs, when the interval destined to Montagu Hubert's itinerant studies between school and college being over, the General and his family returned to England.

Sharp was the sparkle of Mrs. O'Donagough's still unextinguished eye, when, as she sipped her coffee and luxuriantly enjoyed the columns of the *Morning Post*, she came upon the following paragraph: "Arrived at their

mansion in Berkeley Square, Lieutenant General Hubert, his lady, and suite."

"That's delightful!" she exclaimed; "I declare to heaven that I shall have almost everything I want and wish in the world, if I do but get Agnes and the General here only just to witness one of our best nights! and that crooked-back little aunt Betsy too! It is not very likely that she should *see* it, but she'll hear of it, Donny, won't she? Don't you enjoy the idea of it?"

"To tell you the truth, my dear, I do not care one single straw about it," replied Mr. O'Donagough. "A year or two ago, indeed, when our circumstances were different, that is, I mean, before we were quite settled, I certainly thought that it was important, for Patty's sake particularly, that we should be on good terms with these Huberts,—but now, it surely can make no difference whatever—and her presentation at St. James's, you know, is all settled already."

"You may cry down my relations as much as you please," replied his highly-incensed lady, "but you are monstrously mistaken, and that I can tell you, sir, if you fancy that the name of Hubert is of no importance to us;

often and often, when I have said not a word about it, I have seen its effect—I know not how it may be in your back drawing-room set, Mr. Allen O'Donagough, but this I *do* know, that half, if not all the very best people in my front one, have been got at by means of their knowing that Agnes was my niece. And as to going to court, you may depend upon it that I shall *not* go, notwithstanding all Lady Susan Deerwell's kindness, without taking care to know that Mrs. General Hubert will be at the same drawing-room. Of course Elizabeth will be presented this year, and it will be extremely advantageous that the cousins should be presented at the same time; it will read so well in the papers!—and it is so easy to get it in, you know."

"You are a clever creature, my Barnaby, and I am not going to deny it," said her husband, with a complacent smile, "I only meant to observe that we had gone on very well during the last two years."

"Well? thank God we have! I am sure I am ready enough to acknowledge that;—but still, if you please, Donny, we will not cut the Huberts."

"By no means, my dear,—I have no such

intention; quite the contrary; indeed, I would rather you should leave cards there than not, it will be more civil."

This condescending assurance was quite sincere. Mr. Allen O'Donagough really had no objection to his lady's visiting General Hubert's family; nevertheless, it was equally true that he did *not* care one single straw about it. On first setting off on the bold and ambitious course he was now pursuing, he had seized with a masterly hand upon every object that could help his progress, but now, feeling himself completely afloat, he rather feared impediment than hoped for assistance, from a too-near contact with those around him; and though not insensible to the eligibility of Patty's having such cousins, and his lady such a niece, he was not at all desirous of admitting General Hubert to any very close degree of intimacy.

Such being the prosperous state of her papa, it can hardly be doubted that the state of Miss Patty was prosperous too; and to a certain degree it certainly was so. She was dressed as smartly as she could possibly desire; had *carte blanche* as to the invitations she might wish to give to her friend Matilda; drove in

an open barouche with her mama in the Park every Sunday, and in all fashionable streets during every other day; and finally, was permitted to flirt as much as she liked, with any body, and every body. All this was very delightful, yet Patty was not quite contented, nevertheless. By degrees she brought herself to acknowledge that Jack was neither more nor less than a good-for-nothing false-hearted fellow, who had never intended really and truly to marry her, and who in his heart cared more for playing whist, than for anything else in the world. All this she acknowledged to Matilda, though to both mother and father she still persisted that she *had been* engaged to him, quite entirely engaged to him, but that she did not much care whether it came to anything or not. Of this statement her papa did not believe a single word, though he never for a moment hinted his incredulity either to herself or any one else. What Mrs. O'Donagough's opinion on the subject might have been, it was not so easy to say; because, on some occasions she did not scruple to declare (as in the case of Lord Mucklebury), that she believed the engagement was still going on, though Patty was such a coquettish young thing that she should not

be at all surprised if she turned round and changed her mind any day. While to others, particularly to all young men of rank or fortune, she stated confidentially that such an engagement *had* existed, but that it was clear to her that her dear girl began to doubt her own feelings on the subject, in which case nothing on earth would ever induce her, or her beloved Mr. O'D., to utter a word that might influence her; for, excellent as the connexion was, they were quite determined on this, and every other occasion, to let their only darling consult her own pure heart, and nothing else!

In the midst of all this contradictory variety, Patty, while endeavouring to look mysterious to both father and mother, and saying little on the subject to either, took to hating Jack in her very heart of hearts, most thoroughly and sincerely, and she would have gone very considerable lengths, as she confessed to her friend, to plague him as he deserved. A feeling in no degree less hostile had, also, very naturally supplied, in the breast of the tender Matilda, the place of all other sentiments towards Mr. Foxcroft; and it is probable that nothing but their wholesome fear of Mr. O'Donagough

kept either fair one within the bounds of moderate rudeness, whenever their faithless swains approached them. Nevertheless Patty *had* her flirtations, and Miss Matilda did her very best to have her's too, so that there was not wanting between them a constant fund of confidential secrets which nourished and sustained their friendship in all its pristine warmth and purity.

Having ascertained the affronting indifference of her husband respecting General and Mrs. Hubert, Mrs. O'Donagough called him not again to her councils respecting them, but quietly settled in her own mind how to indulge herself, by fully displaying to them, and to all their daughters and sons, the spectacle of her greatness.

Amongst other simulations of fashionable manners adopted by the prosperous adventurer and his family, was their ignorance and independence of each other's occupations and engagements before dinner. Mrs. O'Donagough was blessed by having at her command one of the most showy carriages in London. Arms embellished by a prodigious number of splendid quarterings adorned the panels, the hammercloth hung stiff with embroidery of the same,

Mrs. Dumbrough about to astonish the Hubert.

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blinds of crimson silk aided the glowing complexions within, and tags, tassels, and silver lace decorated those without. Let those who best know Mrs. O'Donagough, judge what her feelings were in driving to the door of Mrs. Hubert in such an equipage as this.

With care and skill she chose that hour for her visit at which ladies are most certainly visible at home; namely, the interval between the two o'clock luncheon, and the three o'clock *sortie* for shopping.

Mrs. O'Donagough watched with some emotion the colloquy between the servants at the door, but all her doubts and fears were speedily put to the rout by the throwing wide the door of her carriage, and the presentation of the arm that was to assist in her descent from it.

"You will sit in the carriage, and wait for us, my dears," said the swelling lady, with condescending dignity, to the two Miss Perkinses, who occupied the back of the carriage.

"Oh! yes, ma'am! we shall be quite amused, I'm sure," returned Miss Matilda.

"Pray do not think of us!" meekly ejaculated her sister.

"No, no, no,—of course not, my dear; you will do very well I dare say; take care about

drawing up and down the windows. What do you poke that beautifully-laced pocket-handkerchief into your bag for, Patty? I did not buy it for that, I promise you."

"And that's true, and no lie," said Patty, winking at her friend as she prepared in her usual style to precipitate herself out of the carriage after her mama, but at the same time obeying the maternal behest, and drawing forth the fine handkerchief with a flourish that sent it into the eyes of the simpering Louisa.

There were several persons in Mrs. Hubert's drawing-room when Mrs. and Miss O'Donagough were ushered into it. At a small table apart, near a window, sat two very lovely girls, each occupied before a little desk, one copying a page of MS. music, and the other drawing. Behind the chair of the latter stood a tall and graceful young man, whose head was bent forward as in the act of criticising the performance. He started as the servant distinctly pronounced the words "Mrs. and Miss O'Donagough," but did not immediately look up.

On a sofa near a loo-table at the upper end of the room sat Mrs. Hubert, and beside her an elegant-looking little woman, apparently

some few years older than herself, but whose black eyes, neatly-cut little features, and fine teeth, still gave her a right to be called a pretty woman. In a deep chair on the opposite side of the table, another lady, about the same age, perhaps, but infinitely less well-looking, employed herself by incessantly twitching a green ribbon, which being attached to the collar of a poodle lap-dog, occasioned from time to time a sharp little bark that seemed to delight her. Mrs. O'Donagough had observed a carriage waiting at the door, and the dress of these last-mentioned ladies showed that it was for them it waited, and that they, too, were morning visitors.

If satin, feathers, and a profusion of the finest lace, could have made Mrs. O'Donagough look elegant, she would have looked elegant then, for she was dressed like a duchess; nor was her daughter Patty much less splendid; and even had their names been unknown to all the party, their appearance was altogether such as imperiously to have commanded attention. But their names were not unknown to any individual present there.

It is possible that Mrs. Hubert was not particularly delighted by this early visit from

her remarkable aunt, but most certainly she felt considerable consolation from perceiving that her manners, though affectionately familiar, were less vehemently caressing than formerly. In fact, Mrs. O'Donagough felt, and thanked God for the same, that there was no longer any occasion for it; besides, it was impossible to press any body to her heart now, without risking the injury of her exquisite toilette, so she only stretched out one arm as she advanced, saying with a good deal of her most elegant lisp, "How do, Agnes, dear? What an age, isn't it? You would hardly know Patty, would you? How are the children?"

Mrs. Hubert stepped forward, and received the large offered hand very gracefully, giving a smiling answer to each question. Patty followed after, and notwithstanding her anti-Hubert prejudices, stretched out her hand too, which was also received by Mrs. Hubert with a smile, while she turned her head towards the two young ladies at the window, saying, "Here is your cousin Martha, my dear Elizabeth." Thus called upon, a tall, slight, lovely girl rose from the place she occupied, laid her pencil on her desk, and came forward.

"My goodness! Are you Elizabeth?" ex-

claimed Patty, really too much engaged by staring at her, to perceive her offered hand. "Well, I'm sure I should never have known you again—I wonder if I'm as much altered as you?"

"I do not think you are at all altered," replied Elizabeth, sitting down beside her. "But you are looking very well."

"Yes, I am always very well, and you know I have always got a fresh colour," replied Patty, who was frequently apt to suspect, when people told her she looked well, that they might, perhaps, be thinking she had helped herself to a little of her mama's rouge. "Hardly any body has got as much colour as I have; I am sure I often wish I hadn't so much, people stare so. But, my goodness! is that Emily?"

"Oh no! Emily still looks quite like a little girl; that is Miss Seymour."

As she said this, the tall young man stood upright, and stepping forward, extended a hand to Mrs. O'Donagough, while at the same time he paid his compliments to her daughter, by inquiring very civilly after her health.

"Soh! you are here, are you, Sir Henry How d'ye do?" said Mrs. O'Donagough, thrusting a hand towards the young man over

her shoulder, and throwing her plumed head on one side, with a sort of lolloping affectation that was intended to indicate great intimacy.

"I hope Mr. O'Donagough is quite well, ma'am?" said the young baronet, with a considerable augmentation of colour.

"Quite well, dear Seymour," replied the great lady; "I hope we shall see you to-night? How late we kept it up, Tuesday, didn't we? But Lord Mucklebury is always so delightful!"

While this was passing, the lady seated on the sofa by Mrs. Hubert, looked and listened with great appearance of interest and amusement, but said nothing. At length Agnes, who had been watching her with a laughing countenance, addressed Mrs. O'Donagough: "You do not remember these ladies, aunt?" and as she spoke, she pointed to both her bonneted visitors.

"Remember them? No really! have I ever met them before? I live in such a round of company, that, upon my honour, it is perfectly impossible to remember one face from another. You must excuse me, ladies, if I have the honour of your acquaintance, but I have not the slightest recollection of you."

"My name is Henderson," said the lady

on the sofa,—"but formerly it was Mary Peters."

"Mary Peters!" ejaculated the energetic Mrs. O'Donagough, almost with a shriek, "Mary Peters! my own dear first husband's own niece! Gracious Heaven! Well, to be sure, this is a most extraordinary discovery! And this?" turning to the plain-looking, middle-aged mistress of the lap-dog, "this must be, yes, to be sure, this must be Elizabeth?"

"Very true indeed, I certainly am Elizabeth," replied the lady she addressed; "but I am sure I do not wonder at your not knowing me at first, for I had not the least notion who you was. I never saw anybody grown so large in my life."

"You are so dreadfully thin yourself, my dear, that I have no doubt I *do* look rather large to you;" then turning her back in rather a marked manner to her former ally, she addressed an almost interminable string of questions to her sister.

"And so you are married, Mary, are you? Well! that's well. I can't say I am any great friend to old maidism—it spoils people's tempers. I have had three—God bless me! I mean I have had two husbands, both first-rate,

quite first-rate men, in their way, and I can't say I think I should have had the fine temper that I believe everybody allows I have got, if I had remained single all my life. However, perhaps it is not quite civil to say so just now. Are neither of your sisters married, my dear Mary?"

"Oh yes! Lucy has been married many years, and has a very large family."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. O'Donagough with a deep sigh; "then I *do* pity her! There certainly *is* nothing so pitiable as having a large family!"

"Is it worse than being an old maid?" said Miss Elizabeth Peters, with a sneer.

"No, my dear!" replied Mrs. O'Donagough, turning sharply round upon her; "nothing, of course, can be so bad as that. And how is your mother, Mary? and your father? and James? I dare say he is married, isn't he?"

"Yes, ma'am, he is married also."

"And what sort of style are you all living in? comfortable, I hope? We must not mind your being a little humdrum, if you are comfortable: but let that be as it may, you must come and see me; I think my drawing-rooms will please you. But, dear me! how every-

thing depends upon comparison! I remember as well as if it was but yesterday, thinking your drawing-rooms in Rodney-place quite beautiful, but when you come to see mine, my dear, you won't expect me to think so any longer. In fact, my dear Mr. O'Donagough has so very superior a taste that I must not talk of comparing what he orders to anything else; I really want you to see my new carriage, Agnes—it will strike you, I think, as something quite out of the common way."

Mrs. Hubert smiled, and bowed, and looked at Sir Henry Seymour, and then at her lovely daughter, as if to consult them both as to what her aunt was talking about, being herself quite at a loss to decide whether she were in jest or earnest. But she did not venture to speak, for fear of making some blunder, and Mrs. O'Donagough, increasing every moment in the delightful consciousness of causing unbounded astonishment, began again.

"And pray, Agnes dear, who is that?" she said, nodding her plumes in the direction of Miss Seymour; "it is not one of Frederic Stephenson's girls, is it?"

"That young lady is Miss Seymour," replied Mrs. Hubert gravely.

"A sister of yours', my dear Sir Henry, eh? Pray introduce her,—I shall be quite delighted."

Caroline Seymour, who was several years younger than her brother, and one of the most timid creatures that ever existed, started up the moment these words were spoken, and before her brother could perform the ceremony demanded of him, was already, though trembling and covered with blushes, close to Mrs. O'Donagough, and extending her hand with an air that gave her the appearance of being eagerly impatient to make the acquaintance.

Mrs. Hubert looked at her with astonishment, while Elizabeth Hubert, not too well knowing what she herself intended, rose also, and seizing the other hand of her young friend, endeavoured to draw her away, convinced that she was acting under some delusion, and that she fancied Mrs. O'Donagough had some claim upon her acquaintance which it was necessary she should acknowledge.

Elizabeth Hubert was partly right. Poor Caroline knew that the terrible-looking woman before whom she stood and trembled, *had* a claim upon her acquaintance, which, let her hate it ever so much, she would have acknowledged in church or market, in court or city, in

public or in private. Clinging to her brother as her protector, and only relative, loving him beyond all things, and knowing herself, all childish as she was, to be his only *confidante* and adviser in the unfortunate secret, to the preservation of which he attached so much importance, she would have knelt at the feet of Mrs. O'Donagough, rather than offend her, for she knew but too well that this secret was in her keeping.

Mrs. O'Donagough herself looked rather astonished, and though in her present mood she would hardly have felt a salutation from royalty itself more than she had a right to expect, she nevertheless had some consciousness that this peculiar eagerness to make her acquaintance, must have a peculiar cause, which, however, she was at no loss to find, for, after a moment's consideration, she became persuaded that her shy, but still enamoured brother, must have enjoined it.

"A very nice sweet-looking girl, indeed, Sir Henry," said Mrs. O'Donagough, continuing to hold Caroline's hand, as in a vice, and looking up in her face with a leer of playful protection; "you may bring her to us whenever you will, Sir Henry. Patty, who, as you well

know, is the sweetest-tempered creature in the world, will be quite delighted to take notice of her, and she will soon teach her not to be so terribly shy; upon my honour, the dear girl trembles like an aspen leaf. You must not be afraid of us, my dear—your brother, Sir Henry, you know, is a very old friend of ours, he and Patty, you know, are great cronies. There, come, don't quiver and quake so, as if you were talking to some proud stiff old empress; ask your brother if we ever stand upon ceremony with him? No, no, all that is nonsense, my dear; let my style and station be what they may, I shall never hold myself above taking notice of warm-hearted affectionate young people, who are fond of us; and that I am quite sure you will be, as well as your brother Henry. Patty! make room for this dear girl on that great three-cornered chair that you have put yourself into—nothing like close quarters for making intimate acquaintance."

Thus commanded, Patty did collect her flowing *gros de Naples* a little, and Miss Seymour placed her shrinking delicate figure beside that of the bouncing beauty. But Patty, suddenly catching the expression of Sir Henry's

countenance, which certainly spoke anything but pleasure at the position of his sister, remembered all her injuries at once, and very decidedly shouldering the new friend her mother had bestowed upon her, exclaimed,

"Lor! mama! I wonder you didn't tell her to sit in my lap."

"Caroline!" said Sir Henry, in a voice neither clear nor sweet, "I beg that you will not inconvenience Miss O'Donagough; place yourself here, if you please," and he pushed a chair towards her as he spoke.

The timid girl immediately took possession of it, and considering that, notwithstanding her mimosa-like shyness, she had been always accounted peculiarly graceful in her demeanour, she certainly looked more awkward and abashed than was at all intelligible. Mrs. O'Donagough laughed.

"Sir Henry is right, Patty, isn't he?" said she, "he wouldn't mind it himself, perhaps, but I suppose he thinks young ladies' dresses mayn't agree, whatever they do themselves—it did look a little like what we call riding *Jolliphant* in my country, two ladies upon one horse, you know—and the men never approve of that. But, come Patty! upon my honour

and life we mustn't be staying any longer. What will Lady Susan say if we don't keep our appointment with her? Good bye, Agnes—good bye, Elizabeth—be sure you come to see me, Mary. What's your name? Henderson? Well! I shall be very glad to see you: of course, when a woman marries again, the relations of her first husband can't be quite so near and dear to her as a child by the second. But, notwithstanding that, I'll promise to make you welcome, and my old friend Elizabeth here, too, though she does look a little as if she could not forgive my saying she was thin, and quizzing her about being an old maid. Forget and forgive, Elizabeth! you and I used to be monstrous thick, you know; and so we will again, if you'll come and tell me lots of Clifton gossip, as you used to do. Good bye, you dear little Seymour, you! she is the very picture of her brother, and he is such a pet with us all! Good bye, Sir Henry! don't come down. There is nobody puts me into my carriage, like my own footman."

With these words, and a sort of circular nod, she swam out of the room; and Patty, with another nod, rather less circular, and infinitely less gracious, bounced after her; though not,

it may be observed, without Mrs. Hubert's allowing to herself, that though as vulgar as ever, the young lady had decidedly grown extremely handsome.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MYSTERY CONSIDERABLY INCREASED BY EXPLANATION.

For a full minute and a half after the departure of Mrs. O'Donagough and her daughter, silence the most perfect reigned in the drawing-room of Mrs. Hubert. The palsy of astonishment had fallen upon them all, with the exception of poor Sir Henry, and their powers of articulation seemed destroyed by it. Mrs. Henderson was the first who recovered herself sufficiently to speak.

"Why did you not tell me, Agnes, into what full-blown dignity your aunt was expanded? Full well do I remember the sort of terror and trembling with which my mother used to contemplate her feathers and flounces at Clifton. But though the feathers and flounces remain much the same, the change in their august wearer is prodigious! I do not mean solely from her having spread out into such startling immensity,—you had in some degree prepared

me for that. But why did you conceal the increase of wealth and dignity which seems to have fallen upon her? my weak mind is perfectly overpowered."

"Not more than mine, dear Mary!" replied Mrs. Hubert, laughing, "I do not comprehend it the least in the world. She surprised us, as I told you, by suddenly descending upon us at Brighton, when we all fancied she was safely lodged for life in Australia. But though very showily dressed, and perpetually assuring us that her husband was a man of family and fortune, and a most perfect gentleman, we never had any reason to believe that these statements were more strictly correct respecting Mr. O'Donagough's position in life, than respecting himself; he is by no means an ill-behaved person, looking more like a methodist parson than anything else, but no more like a gentleman than Elizabeth's poodle; and as to their manner of living, it was very nearly what you may remember my aunt's to have been at Clifton. The carriage and horses, and the footmen, are all quite new."

"Have *you* known them long, Sir Henry Seymour?" said Mrs. Henderson, turning to the young baronet.

"Yes,—no, no, not very long, certainly," he replied, while his whole face became crimson.

"At any rate, you seem to be treated as a most intimate friend," observed Mrs. Hubert, looking at him with astonishment, "and perhaps you may be able to tell, better than any of us, though we are all such near relations, how long Mrs. O'Donagough has lived in a fine house in Curzon Street, and possessed a carriage and footman to talk about."

"She certainly meets me with much familiarity," replied the young man, dropping his eyes, but at the same time permitting his countenance to express no inconsiderable degree of *hauteur*, "yet, believe me, I have no right to boast of knowing much about her. I have never known her in London but in this same house in Curzon Street, and as far as I know, she has always had a carriage."

"Well, then! all we can say, dear Mary, is that our aunt is a richer lady than we imagined," said Mrs. Hubert.

"Oh! she always told us she was very rich, you know," said Miss Peters, "and I remember the time when she told my poor father that she intended to leave all her money to us, because it came from our uncle Barnaby."

"Nay, Elizabeth, it cannot be Barnaby money that supports this gay London establishment. I remember your good uncle's manner of living perfectly. *My* good uncle, let me call him too, for it is impossible that anything could be more kind and liberal than he was to me. But his fortune could never, I am very sure, support the style of living that we have been hearing of to-day."

"Is it possible, then, that the man she brought to our house, just before you married, Agnes, and with whom she immediately sailed for Australia, could have been really a man of family and fortune, as she says? I remember the man perfectly. He was a great many years younger than herself, and it is hardly conceivable that he should have married such a woman, excepting for the sake of her fortune."

"And he was a very handsome man too. I remember him perfectly, as well as you, Mary," observed Elizabeth Peters, "and I always supposed that he must have married aunt Barnaby, because he had no fortune of his own."

"Mr. O'Donagough has lost his beauty since that time, Elizabeth, as I think you will allow, when you see him; and, I confess, I do not perceive any remains of it. I have not, in-

deed, the slightest recollection as to what he was like, when he made his visit in Rodney-place; but at present he is anything but well-looking," said Mrs. Hubert.

"I suppose a call upon my uncle Barnaby's widow is a duty imperative upon us?" said Mrs. Henderson. "I think my mother herself would say so, though she was not very particularly partial to the lady, personally."

"I think you must go there, dear friend," returned Agnes, "and in your case this offering to propriety is easily paid. You do not live in London, and may therefore consider yourselves safe from any great or lasting annoyance. This early visit to us would, I confess, rather alarm me for our peace and quiet, were it not that I perceive we are no longer of the same importance to her as formerly. Her manner to me is entirely changed. I, as well as you, Mary, escaped without even an embrace, and I assure you that the time has been, since her return from Australia, when she has held me so long in her arms, that I almost felt doubtful if I should escape from them alive. My dear father too! Thank heaven! she seems altogether to have forgotten him; he is in very delicate health, and her vehement caresses, and

unceasing attentions fatigued him dreadfully. Besides, dear man! he always seemed to think that it would be treating my mother's memory with disrespect, if he were otherwise than affectionate to her sister; I have perfectly dreaded his returning to England, lest he should be again thrown in her way. But she never named him, and it is evident to me that she has got into a set of her own that she prefers to every other. I shall return her call without the slightest feeling of alarm, and we can go together, if you like it."

It is probable that Mrs. Hubert prolonged this discussion a little, in order to give her young friend, Caroline Seymour, time to recover from the very evident embarrassment which the recent scene had occasioned her. Her brother was still hanging over her chair, and whispering something that seemed like a gentle remonstrance. Elizabeth Hubert sat gazing at them with a sort of painful surprise on her beautiful and expressive countenance, which did not escape her mother, who in her heart was longing even for her dearly-loved Mrs. Henderson to go, that she might speak to her.

At length the visit of her old friends, who

were in London only for a few weeks, was brought to a conclusion by Miss Peters reminding her sister of the necessity for their driving to some distant shop before they returned home to the early dinner which was to precede their going to the play. Sir Henry Seymour had taken his leave before, and Caroline, on whose soft cheek the traces of tears were visible when she raised her head to bid him adieu, followed him out of the room, and had not since returned, so that Mrs. Hubert and her daughter were *tête-à-tête.*

"What can be the reason, mama, of Sir Henry Seymour's permitting his sister to make the acquaintance of Mrs. O'Donagough?" said Elizabeth, the moment their visitors were gone. "It is, it must be, his doing, and his wish. Caroline never has any will but his, yet it was impossible not to see her repugnance to this introduction, though she put herself forward in a way she never did before to meet it. What can it mean?"

"I am quite as much at a loss as you are, Elizabeth. Did Caroline ever mention to you her brother's acquaintance with the O'Donagoughs?"

"Yes, mama; but what she said was not so

much informing me of his acquaintance with them, as inquiring of me, whether they were really our relations."

"And when was this, Elizabeth?"

"During the fortnight that Sir Henry passed with us at Paris last year, when he brought over Caroline."

"Can you remember exactly what she said? She must have given some reason for asking the question."

"I recollect thinking that she felt very much ashamed at asking the question, and that was the reason I never mentioned it to you. She asked it very earnestly, and as if she were much interested in the answer; but when I had replied to all her questions, which I did, of course, very frankly, she coloured so much, and seemed, as I thought, to be so extremely ashamed of her curiosity, that I fancied it would be treacherous, and like betraying her having committed a fault, if I repeated the conversation to you."

"Has she ever referred to the conversation since?"

"Never."

"Will you tell me, Elizabeth, exactly what it was she did ask of you?"

Elizabeth meditated for a moment, and then replied,—

"I remember perfectly that the question appeared to me at the time, to be *à propos* of nothing, and it was asked a very few hours after their arrival; as soon, indeed, as we were alone together. As well as I can recollect, her words were, 'Will you tell me, dear Elizabeth, if you have any relations of the name of O'Donagough?' I answered, 'Yes, we have; mama has an aunt who is married to a person of that name.' 'Have they ever been in Australia, and have they a daughter?' demanded Caroline. I answered 'Yes' to both these questions, and then ventured to inquire why she was so anxious to know. It was then that she seemed to think that she was doing wrong, for she coloured violently, and actually trembled, exactly as she did to-day. 'It was my brother,' she said, 'it was on his account that I wished to know.' I wished excessively to ask for what reason he could be curious about it, but I did not, because I saw that she was positively suffering; so from that time to this, the name of O'Donagough has never been mentioned by either of us."

"Sir Henry must have met them acciden-

tally," said Mrs. Hubert, "when they probably did us the honour to mention the relationship, which, perhaps, he did us the honour of disbelieving, and feeling some curiosity to ascertain the truth, commissioned his sister to inquire."

"Yes, exactly so, mama; that is precisely the way in which I interpreted the thing myself, and it was because I thought the curiosity both natural and pardonable, that I chose to say nothing about it. But it strikes me that though your suggestion accounts perfectly for what passed at Paris, it throws no light whatever on the extraordinary scene of to-day. It was very natural that Sir Henry Seymour, if acquainted with the O'Donagough family, might doubt their relationship to you, mama; but the having ascertained that such was the fact, could not surely render it necessary for Caroline to testify such extraordinary eagerness for an introduction, and such very vehement emotion when it took place. I saw Sir Henry's countenance too, and its expression was perfectly extraordinary. He may have been very much surprised, and shocked too, perhaps, at discovering that Mrs. O'Donagough was our aunt, though that is presuming him to be a very silly person indeed, but even *that* will not account,

no, not in the least degree, for the species of emotion which his features betrayed. I am quite sure there is some mystery in all this, mama."

"I cannot conceive the possibility of any," replied Mrs. Hubert. "The notion of Sir Henry Seymour and the family O'Donagough having any mystery in common, is too preposterous; time generally explains all things, and we must trust to his agency, Elizabeth, to explain this."

The few moments occupied by this conversation was a longer period of time than Mrs. Hubert and her daughter had passed together *tête-à-tête* since their arrival in Berkeley Square, and another burst of thunder at the door now told them that it was over. Another, and another succeeded, as the time for the high tide of gossip approached, and the drawing-room looked almost full when again the thunder came, and Lord Mucklebury was announced.

This facetious nobleman, though not a very intimate, was a very old acquaintance of the Hubert family, and seeing that close access to Mrs. Hubert was for the time impossible, as every seat near her was occupied, he deposited his heavy person in a large fauteuil just behind

Elizabeth, and after expressing in cordial but courtly phrase his admiration and astonishment at her growth and her beauty, he began uttering and discussing jokes and gossip, in his usual style, concerning everybody whom he conceived to be of her acquaintance.

"So, Sir Edward and his rich ward have settled accounts I hear, and are the best friends in the world again. They say that Sir Edward's management has been admirable, and that there never was known so profitable a minority. It is a strange match that he is going to make. I beg your pardon, however, my dear young lady, I totally forgot the near relationship."

"What match, my lord?" said Elizabeth, endeavouring to speak tranquilly, "and of what relationship does your lordship speak?"

"Mrs. O'Donagough is your mother's aunt, my dear, is she not?"

"She is, my lord," replied the poor girl, with lips as white as ashes, and a voice so hoarse as to be hardly intelligible.

Lord Mucklebury perceived that she was suffering from some painful emotion, and a moment's thought convinced him that he had made a most unfortunate hit, and that this

collateral descendant of his proud old friend, Lady Elizabeth Norris, was wounded beyond bearing by being reminded of her vulgar connections. Amused by this strong trait of hereditary feeling, yet much too really polite to be capable of exciting it further, his lordship rejoined in a tone of flourishing compliment,

"Distant as the connection is, Miss Hubert, there is some share of the same remarkable beauty that I now see before me. Sir Henry Seymour would never have become attached to Miss O'Donagough, if the young lady's eyes had not sparkled with something of kindred brightness to your own."

Another group of morning visitors entered at this moment, and among them Elizabeth fancied she saw some one to whom she wished immediately to pay her compliments. It appeared, however, that upon drawing near the door, she discovered that she was mistaken, for standing aside while the party passed in, she waited only till the doorway was clear, then slipped through it, and was not again visible that morning.

Mrs. Hubert had remarked her daughter's exit; she remarked also that she did not re-

turn, and wishing to inquire if it were any ailment which occasioned this sudden retreat, she entered the dressing-room of Elizabeth before she proceeded to make her dinner toilette in her own.

"Is anything the matter with you, my love?" she said, approaching the easy chair into which the young lady had thrown herself, "why did you leave the drawing-room so suddenly? you look as if you had been crying, Elizabeth."

"No, mama. There is nothing at all the matter with me, only I have been surprised, very much surprised; but the mystery is quite explained. I have found out, mama, the reason why Caroline was so anxious to be introduced to the O'Donagoughs, and why she seemed so extremely interested about them."

"Have you, Elizabeth?" replied her mother, drawing a chair, and sitting down beside her. "Do pray communicate the discovery to me, for I confess the whole thing has piqued my curiosity exceedingly."

"Sir Henry Seymour is going to be married to my cousin Martha."

"Sir Henry Seymour going to be married to your cousin Martha? That is a very foolish

jest, my dear, whoever invented it," replied her mother, with rather a disdainful smile.

"Lord Mucklebury did not speak of it as any jest, mama, but as a fact perfectly well known. I am surprised as much as you can be," continued Elizabeth, "but I see no reason for doubting its truth; on the contrary, have we not the greatest reason for believing that it is true? How else can we account, mama, for the strange scene of this morning?"

"I should account for it in any way, Elizabeth, rather than this," and there was a glow of painful feeling on Mrs. Hubert's cheek as she said these words, which caused Elizabeth to move still nearer to her, and to say as she took her hand and tenderly pressed it, "My dearest mother! is there any other possible way in which we can account for it?"

Mrs. Hubert did not immediately reply; there were many thoughts working together in her head which kept her silent. The young man of whom they spoke was a favourite with her, though the vexation and anxiety which he had caused to his guardian were well known to her, in every particular, for Lady Stephenson and herself were truly sisters. But notwithstanding all this, notwithstanding the lamenta-

tions she had been accustomed to hear concerning his aversion to a college life, and his very blameable frolic of secreting himself for nearly a year from the knowledge of his attached, though somewhat pertinacious guardian, notwithstanding all this, Mrs. Hubert both liked and esteemed the youth. His tender devotion to his young orphan sister; his repentance for the wrong-headed obstinacy of his concealment, expressed with such manly frankness; his joyous, yet gentle spirit; and the bright intelligence which sparkled through every lively sally, had won from her approval that she was aware was rapidly approaching to affection, and the more rapidly because her husband shared it. Neither of them, perhaps, were insensible to the evident admiration with which Elizabeth had inspired him, and though as yet the subject had never been named between them, neither of them felt indifferent about it, or unaware that it was hardly possible any man could propose for her, that they should be more cordially inclined to approve. All this was too fully in Mrs. Hubert's head to make it all easy for her to reply to her daughter's question. Elizabeth's timid eye watched her mother's countenance during this interval,

and at length she repeated, "Is it possible, mama, to account for it otherwise?"

Thus forced to speak, she said, "Forgive me, Elizabeth! but I must have better authority than your's before I believe it. Lord Mucklebury is a professed jester—he probably meant to mystify you—or it is possible that amidst his flights and flourishes, you have misunderstood him. So I shall not set down Sir Henry Seymour as the *fiancé* of Miss O'Donagough, till I have learnt it from some other quarter than the facetious Lord Mucklebury."

So saying, Mrs. Hubert rose, and having received a very fervent kiss from her silent daughter, left her room, and immediately repaired to that of Miss Seymour.

The poor girl had thrown herself upon the bed, and, as it seemed, had actually cried herself to sleep. She started up as Mrs. Hubert approached the bed, and uttering something about being quite ashamed of her laziness, stood up, to hear what her kind friend was come to say to her.

"My dear Caroline," said Mrs. Hubert, "will you let me ask you how your brother first became acquainted with the O'Donagough family?"

An expression of the most painful kind took possession of the young girl's features, and after the struggle of a moment her tears began to flow.

"I cannot bear to distress you, my dear child," said Mrs. Hubert, "nor can I comprehend how my question can do it. You are, of course, aware that Mrs. O'Donagough is a relation of mine, but both her husband and herself are persons so little likely to fall in your brother's way, that I feel curious to know the origin of their acquaintance."

Instead of replying, Miss Seymour only permitted her tears to flow afresh, and hid her face in her pocket-handkerchief.

"My dear Caroline! This emotion is most extraordinary! If the idea of this acquaintance is so painful to you, why did you appear so eager, my dear, to be included in it?"

"For my brother's sake, Mrs. Hubert, for his sake only; surely you must guess———"

"*That I should never seek the acquaintance for my own,*" were the words which would have followed, had not the young lady, recollecting that Mrs. O'Donagough was the aunt of her kind hostess, suddenly stopped herself, amidst blushes and renewed agitation.

Mrs. Hubert waited for a moment to see if she would go on, but finding she did not, she dropped the hand she had taken, and saying with a sigh which she could not repress, "Yes, my poor Caroline, I do guess," left the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD TIMES ARE CHANGED, OLD MANNERS GONE—HONOUR AND GLORY—MATERNAL WISDOM, AND FILIAL REVERENCE.

As Mrs. O'Donagough descended the stairs from Mrs. Hubert's drawing-room, she suddenly recollected the existence of her beloved brother Mr. Willoughby; and, with a little inward laugh of delight at remembering how very much she was now above caring for the kindness and patronage of any little old man in the world, she stopped short in her passage through the hall, though it was ringing with the sound of "Mrs. O'Donagough's carriage," and demanded of the porter the address of this, till now, very precious connection.

On being informed that Mr. Willoughby resided in Park Lane, she determined to "take him," as she told Patty, and the Misses Perkins, in her way to Hyde Park, where she intended to regale the world of fashion for half an hour by the sight of herself and her

bright-eyed daughter. Could the gentle Mr. Willoughby have had the slightest glimpse of fore-knowledge as to who was making her rattling, dashing, way towards him, it is probable that despite all his conjugal respect for the memory of his first lady, he would have retired to his bed-room, and declared himself, very truly perhaps, too ill to see any one. For the impression left by his adventures at Brighton was terrible, and of the kind not likely to evaporate by the process of meditation. But though in all the ordinary affairs of life it may be very truly said, that—

> Old experience doth attain
> To something like prophetic strain,

yet in this case it would have led him altogether wrong. A change had come over Mrs. O'Donagough, which ensured his safety more effectually than any bolts and bars could have done, for had her feelings still retained the same ardent warmth towards him, such impediments would hardly have rendered him safe. But now the tempest of her love was effectually stilled, and all that remained of the voilent emotions which had so strongly moved her, was a dignified yet condescending

politeness, which, her dress also being taken into consideration, was sure to keep him from any further personal violence.

Fortunately the mild old gentleman was not alone, when his drawing-room door was gently opened by his well-taught servant, and the names of Mrs. and Miss O'Donagough pronounced. His daughter, Mrs. Stephenson, was seated beside his arm-chair, and as he involuntarily exclaimed, "Oh dear! oh dear!" she cheered him by replying, "Never mind, papa! I'll stay with you; I want to see her again immensely. I am told she is come into a great fortune, and that she is ten thousand times a greater curiosity than ever."

These words were hardly whispered, before the subject of them swam into the room radiant with rouge, and glossy as the richest satin could make her. Had she found Mr. Willoughby alone, it is very likely she might have been able to speak plain, and that a few moderately affectionate inquiries would have sufficed to satisfy her feelings, and to display as much of her changed circumstances as the occasion required; but the sight of Mrs. Stephenson inspired her with very different thoughts and purposes. She remembered how

the noble spirit on which she prided herself had been shaken by the crowd in green and gold; and more bitterly still did she remember how often the application of the little lady's eye-glass had stood in the stead of every other salutation, when she had met her amidst the crowded promenades of Brighton. How her heart at that moment throbbed with thankfulness as she remembered that the lace on her mantlet cost a guinea a yard!

But her throat swelled, externally and internally too; a third chin supervened, and the clearness of her articulation was considerably affected. Patty followed, looking, past all contradiction, exceedingly handsome, but about as much like a gentlewoman as a ring-letted head in a hair-dresser's shop window.

"How do, dear sir?" said Mrs. O'Donagough, lispingly, and holding out a single finger as she approached the idolized brother-in-law of former days. "I know you are but a poor creature as to health, and therefore I have waived all ceremony, and come to inquire for you without taking any notice of your not having waited upon me. Never mind about getting up; perhaps you have got the gout. There, there, sit down, and keep yourself

quiet; you look dreadfully thin, to be sure, but yet I may pay you a compliment upon your complexion: if you ain't flushed, you've got a capital colour. But perhaps you may be heated, sir? dear me! what a monstrous small room you have got! When you are well enough, to come and see me, sir, in Curzon Street, I think you will quite enjoy the size of my rooms."

Inexpressibly relieved, Mr. Willoughby replied with great kindness of manner that he was very glad she had met with a house she liked, and hoped Mr. O'Donagough and the young lady were quite well.

"You do not remember me, Mrs. O'Donagough?" said Mrs. Stephenson, laughing; "we have never met since we left Brighton, and the gaieties of London have put all your former acquaintances out of your head. I hope I see you very well?"

"Yeas—perfectly well, I thank you. I adore London, and never really enjoyed my health till we settled here," replied Mrs. O'Donagough.

"It does, in truth, seem to have agreed with you extremely. You look charmingly plump and well, and so does your daughter

too; she is so wonderfully grown and improved, that I should not have known her without hearing her named. Have you seen your cousin Compton, lately, Miss Patty?"

"No, ma'am," said Miss Patty, very sulkily.

"Indeed? That is too bad of him!" rejoined the mischievous lady, "for he is in the Guards now, and constantly in town."

"Is he?" said Mrs. O'Donagough, in a tone of rather languid indifference; "I wonder I have never heard Seymour mention him. But Henry knows," she added, with a slight laugh, "that I never patronize mere boys."

"Who is Henry? Are you speaking of Sir Henry Seymour?" said Mrs. Stephenson, half amused, and half puzzled.

"Yeas—Sir Henry Seymour; your brother Sir Edward's ward, you know. He is a great friend of ours," she added, after a pause, and with her eyes very fully directed to Patty.

"Impossible!" had very nearly escaped Mrs. Stephenson's lips in return; for she understood the look, and the accent too, exactly as it was intended she should do, and having ideas of her own on the subject of Sir Henry Seymour, which rendered the information they conveyed extremely far from agreeable,

she had some difficulty not to pronounce a flat contradiction. But having thought better of it before the word was spoken, she only said, "Have you known him long?"

"Oh! yes," was the reply; but these two little words were spoken in a very skilful manner, and said much.

Had Mrs. Stephenson been rather less warm-hearted and warm-headed, she might have given Sir Henry Seymour the advantage of a little more consideration of probabilities than she did upon hearing this "Oh! yes." But she looked at the great brilliant staring beauty opposite to her, and remembering the pale unobtrusive loveliness of Elizabeth, permitted herself to tingle to the fingers' ends with indignation, while she received the impression that the man whom she had fixed upon in her heart for her nephew, was adoring the meretricious goddess instead of the genuine angel.

If not reasonable enough to acquit him, however, she soon recovered sufficient discretion to conceal what she felt, and consoled herself with the belief that she should still be in time to give such a caution to her sister Agnes, as might check the present intimate

intercourse between the young people, before it had gone far enough to compromise the happiness of her dearly beloved, and greatly admired niece.

Notwithstanding Mrs. Stephenson's quickly awakened caution, the well-contented Mrs. O'Donagough saw that she had made an impression; and skilfully passed on to other themes, not having any wish or intention of fixing the imputation which she had suggested at all more deeply than might suffice to plague the faithless Sir Henry a little, and add a feather to her daughter's coronet of conquests, without committing herself by any positive assertions.

"I suppose you don't plague yourself about going to court now, Mr. Willoughby? it's a dreadful bore, isn't it? But that's one of the troubles which having a daughter to bring out occasions!" said Mrs. O'Donagough, with a sigh; then turning abruptly to Mrs. Stephenson, she added, "When is Elizabeth Hubert to be presented?"

It is probable that this question, preceded as it was by the hint of Mrs. O'Donagough's own intentions, might not have received a very direct answer, had it not been that the

fair lady to whom it was addressed was entirely lost in reverie, and quite unconscious of every thing that had been said since Mrs. O'Donagough's insidious "Oh! yes," had entered her ears. Without any hesitation, therefore, she replied, with a slight start from the suddenness of the address, "At the next drawing-room."

"Well, Patty! we must not indulge to-day in a long gossip with your good uncle; we must be off, dear, or positively we shall not get through what we have to do; Lady Susan always keeps me such an age! Adieu! brother Willoughby! Come and see us, there's a good man; it will do you a vast deal of good, depend upon it. Changing the air is always good for an invalid, and most certainly you can hardly have a greater change than from this little bit of a room, to our suite of drawing-rooms in Curzon Street. Good morning, Mrs. Stephenson; of course I shall be vastly happy to see you, if you choose to call. Ceremony between such very near connections is quite ridiculous. Good morning."

Mrs. Stephenson was lost in astonishment, Mr. Willoughby in delight, at the prodigious

change which unknown circumstances had wrought in the style and manners of Mrs. O'Donagough.

"What in the world does all this mean, papa?" exclaimed the still pretty Nora, as soon as the door was closed upon her. "She has ceased to hug you, does not appear to retain the slightest awe of me, and both herself and her Brobdignag beauty are dressed *à peindre*, that is to say, their dresses are perfect. But unfortunately for such folks, there is no *Madame* anything who has taken out a patent for disclosing the secret of putting them on. Thank heaven! that is a power still exclusively reserved *à nous autres*, and not all the Reform Bills in the world can take it from us!"

"Dearest Nora! that is all very true, I believe," said her father, rousing himself from the agitation occasioned by the sudden apparition of Mrs. O'Donagough, and profusely steeping his handkerchief in *eau de Cologne*, "but what are the peculiarities of dress, compared to those of manner? I do assure you, my dear, that I have the very greatest desire to be kind and cordial to all with whom I became connected by my first marriage. I

have very particular reasons for wishing it. But this good Mrs. O'Donagough's manner used to be———however, there is no occasion to say anything more about that now; I am very thankful, Nora, very thankful, indeed, that it is quite changed. I really hope, my dear, from their dress and appearance altogether, that some considerable fortune has come to them. It must be on the husband's side, for I am pretty sure there was no chance of such a thing on her's. Mrs. Elizabeth Compton certainly is a woman of good fortune —but I think I have understood——"

"Oh! yes papa, Mrs. Elizabeth Compton's fortune is disposed of elsewhere; none of the satins and laces come from her—I am really dying with curiosity to find out what it all means. By your leave, cher papa! I will ring the bell. I must positively make a few inquiries. Be so good as to send my page up stairs," was the order given when a servant answered the bell.

"Ah ça, Achille! Vous avez des yeux, mon enfant. Dites-moi un peu quelle sorte d'equipage était il qui vient de partir?"

"Superbe, Madame."

"Et les gens? les chevaux?"

"Superbes, Madame; tout etait superbe—parfaitement bien monté.

"C'est bon. Va-t-en."

"Now is not this most extraordinary, papa? Do you remember Mrs. O'Donagough's style of trotting about at Brighton? Oh! you must—for how often did she make you trot with her! and you hear what her present style is. Is it not mysterious?"

"No, my dear; not if Mr. O'Donagough has got a fortune left him."

"That is true, certainly; and yet, in all cases of that kind, one is pretty sure to hear of the fortune first, and see the effect of it afterwards."

"That makes no great difference, Nora. They could not spend all this money if they had not got it, and I am certain nobody can feel more inclined to rejoice at their good fortune than I do."

"Did you observe what she said about Sir Henry Seymour, papa?"

"Not very much, Nora; I was really selfish enough to be thinking of myself, and of the great comfort of her being more quiet in her manners," replied the gentle Mr. Willoughby.

"I shall visit her, papa, I am quite determined upon it."

"Do, my dear; it will be very good-natured of you."

"Perhaps not quite that," said Mrs. Stephenson laughing; "nevertheless, my motive is not a bad one either—I cannot comprehend the thing at all—Seymour, of all men in the world! I must throw some light upon all this, papa, and I know not any mode of doing this, so effectual, as introducing my own radiant presence into the scene of action."

"If there be a mystery, Nora," replied her father, "I certainly can name no better investigator than yourself; but I suspect you will find none. My good sister-in-law has by some means or other grown rich, and this, somehow or other has rendered her less affectionate, or, at any rate, less demonstrative. I do not think I should mind asking her to dinner now, if you and Agnes will arrange it all for me."

"Very well, papa; nous verrons. And now, good bye; I have a thousand things to think about and to do."

* * * * *

So had Mrs. O'Donagough. On re-entering

her carriage she seated herself with an energy of descent that severely tried the temper of the springs, and set the two Miss Perkinses swinging. "I have got *that much* out of her, at any rate, Patty, haven't I, my dear?" said she, dismissing her extra chin, and recovering her voice.

"About Miss Elizabeth's going to court, mama? Yes, I did want to get at that, and now we have it, safe and sure," replied Patty joyously. "I must say I *shall* enjoy going the same day that she does. She is such a quiz of a girl! and oh! so proud and stiff, Matilda! I am sure she would make you both sick if you could see her; she is ten times worse than she was at Brighton."

"The Lord forbid, Patty! for see her they shall, you may depend upon that. Upon my life, girls, she has no more colour than my pocket handkerchief, and though I won't pretend to say that her features are bad, I give you my honour that she's no more to be compared to Patty, than chalk to cheese. But here we are, girls—out with ye all! this is the court-dress maker's, and now you shall see if I don't make Donny's shiners gallop: he told me to spare nothing in our court-dresses, and

I don't intend it. Dear Lady Susan! what should we do without her! I promised I would send her a plume exactly the same as my own —and that shall be one of the handsomest that ever was seen at St. James's. She deserves it, dear kind soul! for if she had not offered to present us I should have had to ask some of my own nasty stiff-backed relations; and, after all, you know, there is not one of them that is the daughter of an earl. She shall have her feathers, dear old soul! she may depend upon it, and her table too, every night if she likes it, with her own stakes and her own party."

This grateful effusion was confidentially uttered in the ear of Miss Louisa Perkins, (now promoted to the regular, but by no means sinecure place of Mrs. O'Donagough's toady,) as they walked together up the stairs which led to Madame Bonéton's splendid show-rooms.

"Oh! what a sight! did you ever!" exclaimed Patty, as she entered this fairy-land of woman's wishes, and of woman's dreams, embodied and tangible.

"Dear me! how beautiful!" cried Miss Louisa.

"Oh! goodness! how lovely!" sighed Miss Matilda.

"Can you fancy any woman looking quite ugly in that angelic bonnet?" demanded Patty.

"Let me see Madame Bonéton herself," commanded Mrs. O'Donagough.

These last words were not spoken in a tone to be neglected, not to mention that the elegant young lady who replied to them had seen the splendid equipage from which the speaker descended.

"Madame will be here immediately," said the elegant young lady. "She is at this moment engaged with the Duchess of Liddisdale respecting her only daughter, the beautiful Lady Isabella's presentation dress. But she must have nearly finished, for they have been here a long time."

"Isn't it lucky, Louisa?" whispered Mrs. O'Donagough; "now we shall be able to find out exactly the right thing. One beautiful only daughter going to be presented, especially as she seems to be of suitable rank, may safely serve as a pattern for another. Let us sit down here, Louisa, while we wait. Isn't it all lovely?"

"Lovely indeed!" responded Miss Louisa.

"To be sure I do sometimes think," said Mrs. O'Donagough with a fulness of satisfaction, which for the moment banished all reserve, and made her almost think aloud, "I do sometimes think, Louisa, that great abilities, thorough real cleverness I mean, is a better fortune for a girl, that is supposing she is tolerably well-looking, than almost any money in the world. You know I open my heart to you about everything, and therefore I don't mind telling you that my father and mother, notwithstanding their high birth, and great gentility, had no more right to expect that I should ever be in such a place as this, ordering court-dresses for myself and my daughter, than you have to be queen of England. Oh! dear!—how well I remember going shopping in our little town, where my father was the rector. It was a very fine living, and a magnificent parsonage-house; but I do so well remember my contrivances to get handsome ball-dresses for myself and my sister Sophy—ha! ha! ha!—I can't contrive to make you exactly understand all about it, but to be sure I have managed from that time to this, to get on monstrous well."

A movement in an inner room, and then the stately march of three ladies out of it, followed by Madame Bonéton, announced that the consultation was broken up; and in another minute, the elegant young lady having whispered something in the ear of the imperial-looking mistress of the establishment, Mrs. O'Donagough's highest state of felicity began, by seeing that august personage approach her, and hearing the enticing words, "What may I have the honour of showing you, ma'am?"

"I wish to see whatever you have of the very best and highest style, by way of court-dress. Presentation dresses—that is, I mean, for my daughter; of course I do not mean that *I* have never been presented—that *would* be a good joke, Louisa, wouldn't it? But nevertheless I wish that my own dress should be superb, and that of my daughter something nearly equal to it. By the way, what did the Duchess of Liddesdale order for Lady Isabella?"

This was said in Mrs. O'Donagough's best manner, and if overheard by her husband would unquestionably have won from him the cordial exclamation of "Well done, my

Barnaby!" Its effect on Madame Bonéton was just what she intended.

"You know her grace, madam?"

"We meet at every party throughout the season, but I won't tell you that we are great friends, which I dare say you saw as she passed. But the fact is, my daughter has stood in the way of Lady Isabella more than once, and the foolish duchess cannot forgive it. I don't care a straw for that, however, it only piques me to keep up the rivalship. I often say that the duchess's jealousy of my daughter will make the fortune of my dressmakers. What has been ordered? you must positively tell me, Madame Bonéton, what has been ordered to-day for Lady Isabella?"

Madame Bonéton was almost as clever a woman as Mrs. Barnaby, and immediately gave such a description of the noble young lady's dress as enabled her to dispose of various articles for which she was rather particularly anxious to obtain a sale, and the business ended by a dress being ordered for Miss Patty, and for her mama likewise, both of which were ingeniously contrived in such a manner as to accommodate more embroidery, more flowers, more fringe, more tassels, more

spangles, and more lace, than any two dresses ever carried before into a royal presence.

It would be too difficult to describe justly the swelling joy, the broadly-smiling contentment, the swimming ecstacy of Mrs. O'Donagough, as she made her last *congé* to Madame Bonéton, for any wise pen to attempt it. She hardly felt the ground beneath her feet as she descended to her carriage, though had the ground beneath her feet been sentient, the unconsciousness could not have been reciprocal, for not only did the high consciousness of what she had been about dilate her majestic person to the eye, but it gave a firmness to her tread which might have rivalled the sublime march of an elephant.

"Let this plume of feathers follow me to my carriage," she said; "I mean it as a present to a friend, and will leave it as I go home; remember that every direction I have given be accurately followed. The slightest inaccuracy will be remarked; and as expense is no object, let every article be perfect, absolutely perfect in its kind."

The two Miss Perkinses, intimate as they were with Mrs. O'Donagough, had never seen her at anything like this degree of elevation

before; there was a sort of sublime excitement in all her looks and words that almost made them tremble, and which, added to the orders they had heard her give, made them follow her down stairs, with feelings of veneration almost too profound to be pleasant. Even Patty herself was perhaps a little astonished, but she had too much inherited firmness of spirit to be overwhelmed by it.

"Isn't mama a first-rate thorough-goer?" she said to her friend Matilda, while waiting for Mrs. O'Donagough's not very easy introduction of herself into her carriage. "How she has wriggled papa out of his stingy ways, to be sure!"

Between the dwelling of Mrs. Bonéton, which was in St. James's Street, to that of Lady Susan Deerwell, which was situated in Green Street, Grosvenor Square, Mrs. O'Donagough never uttered a word; it is probable that her feelings were too big for utterance. When the servant's inquiry for her ladyship was answered by the single word "Yes," Mrs. O'Donagough broke this expressive silence by earnestly ejaculating "Thank God!" and having, as usual on all visiting occasions, told the dear Perkinses to sit still

and amuse themselves till she came back, she proceeded, followed by Patty and the plume, up the narrow staircase, to the dirty little drawing-room of her noble friend.

Lady Susan was sitting, as was her wont, in an old-fashioned shabby-looking arm-chair which, like all the rest of her furniture, had more of that sort of antiquity about it which results from long and constant use, than from the well-preserved, or well-imitated stateliness of the *renaissance*. Her ladyship's cap was of exceedingly dirty blonde, and her ladyship's gown of exceedingly long-worn satin. A cat, in better case than anything else in the apartment, was seated in a chair opposite to her, while on a perch close by it, all natural hostility between the parties appearing to be extinguished, screamed a magnificent cockatoo. The note of welcome uttered by this amiable creature rendered all other greetings for some time inaudible, but at length it betook itself to silently nodding its head, and then her ladyship was heard to say, "Never mind, never mind the bird. There, sit down, sit down both of you, but don't disturb the cat. Take that chair, my girl, that one out there; I can't have my cat disturbed."

"How are you, my dearest Lady Susan?" said Mrs. O'Donagough, in an accent of deferential affection, "is that abominable rheumatism that tormented you so last night, more quiet to-day?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, anything about it just now, for I've been busy—I've been making out my card account for the last month. But I tell you what, Mrs. O'Donagough, the tea you gave me last night was most abominable—so weak, I mean. You must recollect, if you please, that if I come to your house to play cards, I do it out of pure kindness, of course, to give a good style to your rooms, you know—but then I must have tea that will keep me awake, remember. I positively will not play without it."

"To be sure not, my dearest Lady Susan! Good heaven! of course! I am so very much obliged to you for naming it! it's so like you! such kindness! so very friendly! I am sure I can never thank you enough!"

This series of exclamations acted much as her ladyship's own hand did upon the back of her ladyship's own cat, which, jealous it may be, of the near and passing approach of the visitor, was come to look after her own in-

terest, and now sat in the venerable spinster's lap. In short, Mrs. O'Donagough's gentle touches so far rubbed down the temper of the old lady, that she said with rather unusual civility, "Well! and what do you come for now?"

"Give me that box, Patty!" said Mrs. O'Donagough, without making any direct reply. "Here, my dearest Lady Susan, is the real object of my coming. May I flatter myself that these feathers suit your taste?"

"They are well enough for feathers," replied the noble, but very sour-looking maiden, "but it is quite nonsense, and out of the question, if you suppose I can stick them on by way of a head-dress to go to court. That may do all very well for a young girl, like your blowsy Miss there, with a cart-load of curls on her head, but you know well enough it won't do for me; I must have a cap to wear with them, if they are to be of any use."

"Of course, my dearest Lady Susan, I never dreamt of anything else; but as I observed to Patty, as we drove along to Madame Bonéton's, it would not do at all for me to take the liberty of buying your ladyship a cap, till your ladyship had been kind enough

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Mrs. O'Donagough bribes Lady Susan to present her and Patty.

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to tell me what sort of one your ladyship would like."

"Why for that matter, there's no such great variety, Mrs. O'Donagough. The only question is between Brussels point, and blonde, and I like the Brussels point best."

"And Brussels point it shall be, my dearest Lady Susan. And now about the day, you know. The next drawing-room is fixed, Madame Bonéton tells me, for the 29th—I hope that will suit your ladyship?"

"Suit? humph! I can't very well say it *suits* me, Mrs. O'Donagough, for the plain truth is, I have got no suit at all. It's years, and years, since I last went to court, and I thought you knew that I should never have dreamed of going now, with no earthly motive but just to present you and your daughter. I should never have dreamed of going, if you had not promised that I should have no trouble at all about it—and what's more, I won't neither. Really I have no notion of it,—it is quite too bad."

"My dearest Lady Susan!" began the frightened Mrs. O'Donagough, "you have only to say exactly what you want, and wish, and Madame Bonéton shall send it in without

your having the least trouble in the world. Will your ladyship have the great kindness to give me a little list of everything you would like to have, and I will see to it, without giving your ladyship the least atom of trouble in the world."

"There is no need of a list, Mrs. O'Donagough," replied the old lady, taking a long pinch of snuff; "I only want a proper dress to go to court in. The train must be black velvet, and the petticoat satin; I don't care twopence about the colour. Only don't forget the gloves and shoes, you know."

"I will forget nothing, dearest Lady Susan! You will go with us, then, on the 29th?"

"Yes, if all my things are sent in properly, without my having any trouble about it, I will."

"*Good* morning, then, dearest Lady Susan! I will take care that everything shall be right. *Good* morning."

"Take the plume back with you, for mercy's sake. I can't think how you could be so thoughtless! How do you suppose my old Alice would like to have the plague of fastening it in?"

"To be sure! what a fool I am! so very

thoughtless! Take the box again, Patty—*Good* morning, dearest Lady Susan!"

"Good bye. There, that will do—I hate shaking hands. Take care that I get some good tea this evening, Mrs. O'Donagough; don't go and forget that."

"Depend upon it, dearest Lady Susan! depend upon it;" and with these words Mrs. O'Donagough at length tore herself from her most valued friend.

"To be sure nothing ever was more kind and flattering than dear Lady Susan Deerwell's behaviour to Patty and me. People may call it illiberal, or affected, if they will, but I do like the nobility, and it is no good to deny it," said Mrs. O'Donagough, as soon as she was re-seated in her carriage; and she then added, "I hope you won't be tired with a little more driving,—you two I mean, Louisa and Matilda,—for you will have to get home to Brompton, you know; but I really must go down to Madame Bonéton's again."

Her obsequious friends, of course, assured her that the greatest pleasure they *could* have, was to go about with her. On again reaching the portico of this votary-thronged temple of fashion, Mrs. O'Donagough, in her usual

unceremonious manner of settling all things in which the dear good Perkinses were concerned, proclaimed that she did not wish them again to enter it with her; and taking Patty, with the footman and the box, mounted to the shrine, before which the priestesses were still performing their respective offices. The most exact and satisfactory orders were then given respecting the court-dress of Lady Susan Deerwell; with a hint, in conclusion, that her ladyship did not wish her ladyship's bill to be sent in to her ladyship till Christmas, at which season her ladyship always settled all her ladyship's accounts.

"Good gracious, mama!" whispered Patty, as they descended the stairs, "how frightened the old woman will be when the bill is sent in; I thought you were going to make her a present of it all, and I am sure she thought so too."

"I dare say she did, my dear," replied Mrs. O'Donagough, "and I had my suspicions that you might fall into the same mistake, and it was just for that reason that I made you come up, and left the Perkinses in the carriage, because I hope it will be a useful lesson to you, Patty. When people have a great object

in view, my dear, and your papa says our going to court is a very great object, they should always make use of every means in their power to bring it about. But when it is done, Patty, they of course owe it to themselves to take care that the sacrifices they have made to obtain it should become as little injurious to them as possible. This is the principle upon which I have just acted, and you may depend upon it, my dear child, that without firm and steadfast principles of action, no one will ever get honourably and prosperously through life."

"That's all very well, mama," replied Patty, "but I'll bet you five pounds the old lady will never speak to you again after she finds out the trick you have played her."

"Well, my dear," returned her mother with great dignity and composure, "and what difference will it make to me, whether she does or no? I choose to have a person of title to introduce me at St. James's: to obtain this, I submit to endure considerable annoyance, and to suffer many inconveniences. Good—I ought to do this, I should be unwise if I did not. But the object once obtained, should I be wise to submit still to these annoyances?

No, Patty; what was wise before, would be folly after, and render me totally unworthy of the confidence your father reposes in me. Remember all this, my dear girl, and always act, as much as possible, in conformity to my example."

At this moment Mrs. O'Donagough's carriage, which had been obliged to make way for another, recovered its place before the door, and the mother and daughter entered it, the happier, and the better, for the delay; for the young lady felt that she had listened to what might be very useful to her, one day or other, while the elder one enjoyed the most delightful satisfaction that can warm a parent's heart,—namely, the consciousness of having established an excellent principle in the breast of a child.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PREPARATION—THE HAPPINESS AND PROSPERITY OF MRS. O'DONAGOUGH APPROACH THEIR CLIMAX—DRESSING FOR COURT—A SCENE AT ST. JAMES'S.

Two of the most exciting events that her greatly-varied life had given rise to, were at this time rapidly approaching Mrs. O'Donagough. The first was being presented, together with her young daughter, at the court of her sovereign; the other, the giving her first ball at home.

After very long deliberation, it was decided that both these momentous events should take place on one and the same day. There were some reasons against this arrangement, but there were more for it; and moreover, of the latter number were the two overpowering facts, first, that, with the exception of the train, the whole court dress might be worn by both ladies at the ball, and secondly, that having assembled together everybody they

knew, no other opportunity could be so favourable for making the important circumstance of their presentation generally known.

This point once settled, the whole body and soul of Mrs. O'Donagough were offered up with a sort of desperate intensity to the business of preparation. Far different indeed, and triumphantly did she remember the difference, were her preparations now, from what they had been the last time she anticipated the pleasure of seeing her "*own relations*," as she ever described both families of Stephensons, as well as General Hubert's. Perhaps the only point of resemblance was, that the "dear good Perkinses" were aiding and assisting at both; and here there certainly was no change,—for at Brighton they had devoted themselves wholly and solely to do Mrs. O'Donagough's will and pleasure, and so they did now. Miss Matilda, indeed, was no longer the same animated creature she was then, for she had, ever since the unhappy affair of Mr. Foxcroft, entirely changed her style of dress, and her tone of manners. Instead of pale pink ribbons, and variegated wreaths of roses and geraniums, she now confined herself wholly to white muslin, and

the dark, but gracious decoration of *la fleur des veuves.* Her style of conversation, and, indeed, her whole deportment, had undergone a change equally remarkable. She sighed a great deal, and very seldom laughed, and though it is possible that in her *tête-à-tête* intercourse with her ever-faithful Patty, some traces of her former gay disposition might recur, she had decidedly assumed to the eyes of all others that most interesting character, a disappointed young lady. Her first meeting with Mr. Foxcroft had been a little awkward, but the gentleman, *ayant pris sa partie,* exhibited so little consciousness that anything particular had ever passed between them, that at length the two Miss Perkinses made up their minds not to care a farthing about it either, and had it not been that Miss Matilda had a little prematurely communicated to most of her friends and acquaintance the probability of her soon changing her name, the white dress and *la fleur des veuves* might have been altogether omitted. Perhaps, however, it was better that things should be as they were. The white gowns, and *la fleur des veuves,* produced together a sort of transition state, from which it was much easier for

Miss Matilda to emerge again into the bright light of love and hope, than it would have been had their picturesque and gentle sadness never been assumed. Mrs. O'Donagough's ball appeared extremely likely to restore the fair mourner to rainbow tints and frolic smiles, if anything could; and in fact, after a few days of doubtful gladness, during which she had listened almost in silence to Patty's joyous anticipations of this day of days, her spirit yielded itself to the delicious impulse of reviving hope, and upon her young friend's exclaiming, "We'll waltz till five in the morning, Matilda! see if we won't," the mists of disappointed tenderness dispersed, like a cloud before the sun, and, phœnix-like, she rose from the ashes of the flame which had so nearly consumed her.

When the master of a house says, "I wish you to invite everybody you know, and that no expense be spared to make the thing go off well," the *thing*, let it be ball, rout, fête champêtre, or what not, is pretty sure, even in the hands of an ordinary female, to be a very dashing affair. What, then, was it likely to become in those of Mrs. O'Donagough? Time presses, and paper wanes, or whole

pages might be filled in a very useful and interesting manner, by describing all the superb devices to which that high-spirited and tasteful lady had recourse in order to make her ball outshine all other balls. Mr. O'Donagough witnessed all this, but breathed not a single restraining syllable; indeed, it was quite evident that his object was to make a great display, and though his mind was a good deal occupied by affairs of a private nature, he from time to time found leisure to exclaim in the most encouraging tone, "Well done, my Barnaby!" On two points only did he offer any observation that could be construed into interference: the first was concerning the third drawing-room, which he informed her must be kept altogether sacred to the four or five card-tables which by great ingenuity it was made to accommodate: the second was concerning the Champagne. "I will take care," he said, "that it shall all be of a proper quality, but you must remember that a few dozens which I shall set apart, and mark with a cross, are kept exclusively for the card-room. And you must remember, likewise, my Barnaby, that Richardson, the waiter, you know, that I have hired occa-

sionally for that room, must not be called away for anything else; I will give him his orders as to the manner in which he is to wait upon us. And now, my dear, I shall trouble you with no further instructions; attend to these, and I will venture to predict that every thing will go well, and perfectly to my satisfaction. I have already told you that the longer the dancing is kept up the better, and with Patty's charming spirits, and yours, my dear, there will be no difficulty about that."

"None at all, Donny, dear; never you fear about that," replied his thrice-happy wife, "and as for the other things, you may depend upon it I will do my best. About Richardson, and the wine, and all that, of course there will be no difficulty, because you will give him your own orders, and he's a fellow that understands at half a word. But about keeping this third room sacred, as you call it, I am afraid that won't be quite so easy, for you know, Donny, that when the other rooms are full, people will be running in here for air, and for the comfort of the sofas in that beautiful recess, and I am sure I do not know how I shall prevent them."

"Never mind, then, my dear, I'll manage

all that myself. I won't have any candles lighted up in the recess, as there generally are, and then, as it is such an out of the way corner, nobody will be likely to get to it. I know, however, as well as you do, that the room is sure to be full, particularly at the beginning of the evening, but that will be of no great consequence if you will take care to collect all the loiterers when you go down to supper. If we get too busy to relish further interruption, it will be easy enough to shut the doors while you are at supper, and lock them too, if it was necessary; of course, if any observation was made, you would just mention that the gentlemen are at supper."

Mr. O'Donagough knew his admirable wife too well to think that after this short colloquy there would be any occasion to say more. From that time his happy Barnaby had the delight of proceeding with her preparations unchecked, and uninterrupted, by a single observation from him.

Some speculative people may perhaps suspect, that among Mrs. O'Donagough's widely-spread invitations, some might fail of their effect, and that she would have to sustain "many disappointments," but all such are

completely mistaken. The reasons which "all the world," with wonderfully few exceptions, find for accepting an invitation to a ball known to be given on a large and handsome scale, are more various than "all the world" is itself aware of; whereas the effective objections to it, if the virtue of the fair inviter has never been impugned, and a few people of fashion are known to be expected, are few indeed.

As to Mrs. O'Donagough, though by no means of a doubting or timid temper, she herself hardly dared to anticipate the success which attended her. For some excellently good reason or other, almost everybody she had ventured to invite, chose to come, and what with friends, and friends' friends, her list of acceptances far exceeded her hopes.

So actively and admirably had this highly-gifted lady managed her affairs, that when the morning of the 29th arrived, she found herself perfectly at leisure to indulge in a most luxuriantly long toilette in preparation for her appearance at St. James's. The woman who, as all well-informed persons know, even at the very outset of her career had so well understood what the habits of

people of fashion required, as to provide herself with a Betty Jacks, was not likely in this full-blown and prosperous period of her existence to want a lady's maid, perfectly accomplished in her profession. Mrs. O'Donagough was happy enough to have attached such a one to her service, and by half-past eleven o'clock the two dear good Miss Perkinses, and Mrs. Bumpford (the Abigail) stood beside the bed, the sofa, and the chairs of Mrs. O'Donagough's apartment, very nearly "in act to" worship the gorgeous paraphernalia thereupon displayed.

Fortunately the bed-room of Patty was close beside, or rather close behind, that of her mama, and thus the adoration, the sweet commotion, and, in a word, the whole operation of dressing went on together in the two rooms, as if they had been but one.

To any person who loved the study of natural history, it would have been pleasing to see how prettily the generic features of the mother and her offspring displayed themselves. There was precisely the same movement of the different muscles, as the different causes of activity presented themselves. The nerves, and, indeed, each distinctive faculty, seemed

moved by the self-same spring, and one might almost have persuaded oneself that the existences of mother and child were one, so perfect was the

Union in partition

which they exhibited.

By degrees, however, the absorbing interests of each separate mirror compelled them to cease the delicious intercourse between room and room, with which the business had opened. Miss Louisa became fixed where she could gaze at, and applaud Mrs. O'Donagough; Miss Matilda became fixed where she could gaze at, and applaud Patty; while the almost omnipresent Bumpford glided from room to room, with rapture on her lips, and pins between her teeth, till, one by one, every costly article of the multitudinous toilette was adjusted.

"Now, ma'am," said the ladies' maid, "I do think that everything is quite perfect. And to be sure, I never did, in all my experience, see any ladies look so glorious in court-dresses as you and Miss Patty. Isn't it true, ladies?" she continued, turning to the two faithful Miss Perkinses, who had never permitted an

eye to wander during the whole process, "isn't it true? Did you ever see anything so noble as my mistress? what a presence! I shall wonder if the Queen, and all the lords and ladies, don't pay particular attention to her. How the plume sits, ma'am, don't it? And then the spread of the petticoat, showing off so beautiful the embroidery and the bunches of flowers! I would not live with a lady as didn't go to court, if they would double my wages."

"I wish, Bumpford, you would just see if you can't tighten my body the least bit in the world; I look rather larger than I ought to do, don't I, Matilda, about the small of the waist?"

"Oh! Patty, you are perfect!" exclaimed her enthusiastic friend, with hands clasped, and shoulders elevated, as "others use, who sport with" the plastic feelings of young ladies under similar circumstances.

"Very well, then," returned Patty quietly, and for the moment, at least, perfectly satisfied, "very well, then, Bumpford, perhaps you had better let well alone. Of course I don't want to be pinched any more, if I can help it—I know that I can hardly draw my breath as it is."

"Nonsense, Patty!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Donagough indignantly, "for mercy's sake don't speak so like a vulgar housemaid. How do other ladies draw their breath, I should like to know?"

"Don't you talk, mama; I am sure it is quite impossible you can be tight-laced, such an enormous size as you are."

"Oh! my dear Miss Patty! how can you say such a word?" cried Miss Perkins; "there is something so noble in your mama's look, that I am sure it would be all the pities in the world to alter it."

"Lord bless me, Louisa! you need not fly out so," responded Patty; "who told you that I wanted to alter anything? you had much better mind your own business, and not try to set mama against me."

"Hold your tongue, Patty," said Mrs. O'Donagough, too happy to be angry at anything, "you never looked so well in your life. I should like nothing better than just to see Miss Elizabeth Hubert stand side by side with you, to-day; she is no more to be compared to Patty, than the sun to the moon—is she?"

The good-humour of Patty thus judiciously restored, the four ladies descended to the

drawing-room, where the thoughtful Mrs. O'Donagough had ordered biscuit and wine to be placed, to beguile the few last moments before the clock announced that they might set out for the dwelling of Lady Susan.

Like all other ladies who know what they are about, Mrs. O'Donagough and her daughter had been refreshed by a basin of soup during the progress of their dressing; nevertheless they both felt "thankful," as Mrs. O'Donagough expressed it, "for a good glass of wine." And a good, or at any rate, a full glass of wine she took, and another after it, as she remembered how overpowering it must be to find oneself face to face with the Queen, and then, as she stood with the open decanter in her liberal hand, urging the spinster sisters to take another glass, she once more replenished her own for the sake of saying with becoming unction, "Well, Patty! here is good luck to us!"

The few last moments of all were given to admiration of the drawing-rooms, prepared as they were for the festivities of the evening, and then the mother, drawing herself up before one pier-glass, and the daughter before the other, they awaited with beating hearts,

and radiant eyes, the arrival of their equipage.

"Here it comes! mercy on me! I almost wish it was over! just shake out my train once more, Bumpford: come along, Patty. Take care of yourselves, girls! I am glad we settled that you should stay all day, and dress here, for I know I shall be dying when I come back to tell you all about it. Now then!"

And in another minute, the mother and daughter, placed opposite to each other, that each might gaze upon each, were on their way to Lady Susan Deerwell's. The old lady made herself to be waited for so long, that Mrs. O'Donagough's wrath out-blazed her rouge, and, together with her three glasses of wine, caused a redness of the nose, that by no means tended to tranquillize the florid tone of her general appearance. At length the tall pale figure of Lady Susan, perfectly well dressed, but having discarded whatever needless decoration Madame Bonéton had bestowed upon her, entered the carriage, offering so remarkable a contrast to the two figures already in possession of it, that each of the three became aware of it. Their silent observations ran thus—

"What a quaker-like object!" thought Mrs. O'Donagough. "It is well Patty and I have some style about us, or the whole party would be passed over as horrid hum-drums."

"Oh! the hideous old stick!" thought Miss Patty; "but she is no bad contrast though, to such a girl as me."

"Mercy on me! how shall I ever stand this!" thought the noble spinster. "I have the greatest mind in the world not to go now."

But, happily for the debutantes, her ladyship recollected that if she did *not* go, she should not only have to pay for her own dress, but be obliged to give up the high play in which her soul delighted, or at least to abandon one of the most commodious scenes for it that she had ever enjoyed. So she looked at her two companions and smiled, without uttering a single word of salutation, good, bad or indifferent.

"Good morning, dearest Lady Susan!" said Mrs. O'Donagough, perfectly sure that her ladyship's silence proceeded from envy and mortification at the splendid appearance of herself and her daughter; "I hope we have not hurried you?"

"I wish we had settled to go an hour earlier," replied the old lady, perusing the figures of her companions from top to toe; however, I flatter myself the crowd will be very great."

This was literally thinking aloud, and might have puzzled any one who had listened to it, but *that* Mrs. O'Donagough did not, having caught sight of some passing plumes almost as umbrageous as her own, and becoming from that moment too intent upon peeping into every carriage passed, or passing, to have any distinct consciousness of what was said in her own.

The crowd at St. James's was as great as her ladyship could possibly desire, and it was not without difficulty that the three ladies made their way up stairs, and into the presence chamber. By the time they had achieved this, the senses of Mrs. O'Donagough were so completely bewildered, that she knew not what was said to her, which way to turn, or what to do. On reaching the top of the stairs, her first movement was to seize upon the arm of Lady Susan, but this did not answer, for the wily old lady felt that if she submitted to this, the crowd in which she was glorying

Mrs. O'Donagough and Patty create a sensation at Court.

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would have availed her nothing, and therefore, without the slightest ceremony she shook off the weighty arm which had seized her, and saying, "Take hold of your daughter's arm, Mrs. O'Donagough, and walk on," she managed to glide forward alone, and perform the duty she had undertaken with as little identification of herself with her protégées, as it was well possible to imagine.

But if Lady Susan Deerwell had reason to rejoice in the crowd, Mrs. O'Donagough and her daughter had still more, for so completely had they both lost all idea of what they ought to do, and where they ought to go, that but for the impulse from behind, and the occasional repetition of that useful warning, "Go on—Go on," it is probable that they would have performed some very extraordinary evolutions indeed.

As it was, however, they reached the royal lady in safety, but so much before they expected it, that Mrs. O'Donagough started with such violence, as nearly to extinguish the eyes of the unfortunate individual against whom she retreated. Having, however, recovered her equilibrium and her consciousness, she began to feel the most violent desire to pause

and look about her a little; and nothing short of the gentle violence applied to her huge elbow could have induced her to pass on.

Finding that no choice was left her, she perforce followed the line that was moving off, and having by a magnificent tossing round of her lofty head, ascertained that Patty followed, soon reached a point where she found herself at liberty to breathe, look about her, and make herself as conspicuous as possible. Now it was that she found the pleasure which she had promised herself, not altogether imaginary. Till this delightful moment, she had been really hurried on in a manner which had made her almost forget her own magnificence, her daughter's beauty, and the delight of exhibiting both in such a presence. But now she awakened again to a delicious consciousness of it all, and every inch of her seemed to become instinct with lofty thoughts, and dignified delight.

"Where is Lady Susan, my dear?" she demanded of her staring daughter in a tone considerably more sonorous than was usually heard from the spot where she stood; "I can see her nowhere! We must stay here, my love, and wait for her."

The blooming Patty, nothing loth, drew up by the side of her mama, and the two ladies stood together in the most conspicuous place they could contrive to occupy, talking in whispers of all around them, and bringing into action such a variety of

Nods and becks, and wreathed smiles,

as speedily made them the object to which every eye within reach was directed.

Not long after they had taken possession of this station, a group approached from the presence-chamber, which, for a moment at least, drew all eyes from Mrs. O'Donagough's geranium velvet train, and flower-and-fringe-bedecked white satin petticoat, nay even from Patty's pink, and silver, her tassels, and her trumpery, her rouge, and her ringlets, to fix themselves on the very daintiest vision that ever seemed to come direct from Paradise to grace the circle of a mortal's court.

This was a young lady from whose beauteous eyes seventeen summers had scarce sufficed to banish the shy, bright, gazelle-like glance of childhood. There was a look of innocent and delicate timidity in her sweet face that, had need been, would have called

around her a body-guard of all the *preux chevaliers* within reach, and yet there was so much of easy grace in every movement of her tall slight person, that one dared not apply the epithet of shy to *her*, (though one might to her eyes,) lest it should do her the vile wrong of suggesting an idea of awkwardness. Her dress, train and all, was of white satin, the corsage being decorated only with pearls, and resembling in form to that most *historique* of fashions in which Vandyke delighted to paint his fair and noble ladies. A narrow bandeau of pearls sufficed to secure the feathers that gracefully drooped over her dark and luxuriant hair, which was parted without ringlets, and gathered into a rich Grecian knot behind.

Had this beautiful girl been seen surrounded by none but Graces and Nymphs, she would have shone among them like a planet among the lesser stars, and might have challenged not only the court of St. James's, but that of Windsor too, with all its beauties, dead, as well as living, without any danger of meeting a rival; but there was something singularly striking in the contrast offered by her peculiarly refined appearance, and that of poor

Patty, who chanced at the moment of her appearance to be in possession of all eyes, excepting indeed those which were fixed by preference on her mama. There was a smile on more faces than one, as she advanced, among those who love to mark whimsical contrarieties, but this smile changed to a look of unmixed astonishment when Mrs. O'Donagough was seen to stretch forth her enormous arm, and seize upon the hand of the delicate creature who was winning her way onward through the yielding crowd.

Every one, of necessity, left the presence-chamber in single file; and it was only when thus seized upon that Elizabeth Hubert, for she it was who was thus unluckily encountered, turned round her head to look for her mother. Mrs. Hubert was close behind, and despite the equable composure of mind which she usually displayed, she now coloured deeply, and stepped forward to take the arm of her young daughter, with a sort of maternal instinct, not altogether unlike what a dainty doe might have felt, on seeing her pretty fawn run down by a huge elephant.

"Well! my dear Agnes! if this isn't luck!"

exclaimed Mrs. O'Donagough, releasing the daughter while she made a step in advance to clutch the mother. "I am monstrous glad to see you, for we have absolutely lost Lady Susan. But I don't mind it at all now that we have met you, for we can all go on together, and then the cousins can look at each other a little, you know; that's what girls love. But what made you dress her so very plain, my dear? I suppose you think it suits her; everything depends upon style, certainly. Patty looks well, don't she?"

While this was uttered, the imprisoned Mrs. Hubert walked onwards without raising her eyes from the ground, and her friends must forgive her if, for once in her life, the quiet unpretending self-possession of her character gave way before the nervous agitation produced by this encounter. Yet in the midst of it she felt glad, rather than sorry, that General Hubert was not with them, and though really frightened by the loud tone of her aunt's terrible laugh, which she well knew must be bringing all eyes upon them, she struggled to sustain such an appearance of composure under the infliction, as should prevent her from herself becoming a part of

the comedy they looked upon. But there was one who, notwithstanding all her efforts to look tranquil, saw that she was suffering, and thereupon, with more zeal than discretion perhaps, pressed forward to rescue her and her blushing daughter from their painful companionship.

"Let Sir Henry inquire for the carriage, mama!" said Elizabeth, on seeing him approach, and quite forgetting all she had been meditating upon for the last three weeks. Without speaking a word to either party, Sir Henry Seymour wedged himself rather unceremoniously between Mrs. Hubert and her daughter, silently offering an arm to each, which was as silently accepted. But Mrs. O'Donagough was not to be so dismissed. Keeping fast hold of Agnes, notwithstanding the difficulties offered by the presence of the crowd to an arrangement which placed four persons in a row, she put her other arm behind her and pulling Patty, who was following closely at her heels, into a situation favourable to the manœuvre, she contrived by a sudden jerk to withdraw Mrs. Hubert's arm from that of Sir Henry, saying at the same time, "Give your other arm to Patty—there's

a good fellow; I'll take care of my niece, if you'll look to the girls, Sir Henry."

For a moment the young man forgot his secret, and all the fears connected with it. "Pray take my arm, Mrs. Hubert," he said, without noticing the request of Mrs. O'Donagough, or appearing either to see or feel Patty, whose plumes were in his face—but this imprudence was bitterly repented when his indignant fellow-voyager pronounced the monosyllable "Jack?" in an accent which he perfectly understood, though nobody else did. The effect was magical; Mrs. Hubert's arm was instantly resigned, and his elbow presented to Patty instead. "Will you take my arm, Miss O'Donagough!" he said, in a tone so quiet and subdued, that Elizabeth, who had no notion that the word Mrs. O'Donagough ejaculated had any reference to him, instantly fancied that tenderness towards Patty occasioned this softened tone, and that, although he might probably not have wished to distinguish his *fiancée* by any public attention, he could not resist the temptation thus thrown in his way. This confirmation of Lord Mucklebury's intelligence caused her to shudder from head to foot, a very natural

consequence of which was, that she withdrew her arm from that of the tortured young man, and making a sudden movement forward, urged her way through the crowd alone.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. O'Donagough!" said Agnes, forcibly withdrawing her imprisoned arm, "but I must beg you to let me follow Elizabeth."

"Oh! by all means, my dear; of course I shall see you to-night."

These last words, uttered very nearly in Mrs. O'Donagough's loudest key, were at least satisfactorily heard by those around; though, if heard, they were unheeded by her to whom they were addressed; for too well did Mrs. Hubert comprehend the feeling which had caused her daughter to drop the arm of Sir Henry; and too anxious was she to be with her, to leave any faculties at leisure wherewith to listen to her terrible aunt.

As Agnes retreated, Mrs. O'Donagough passed behind Patty and Sir Henry, and possessing herself *sans ceremonie* of the arm which poor Elizabeth had quitted, marched him forward in a position as completely contrasted to that which he had held a few

minutes before, as it is possible to imagine,—Mrs. Hubert and Elizabeth being upon his arms in the first case, and Mrs. O'Donagough and Patty in the second.

Having thus *by force of arms* compelled the unfortunate Sir Henry Seymour to remain exposed in this conspicuous condition to the eyes of half his acquaintance for a longer space than any party ever lingered in the same purlieus before, Mrs. O'Donagough at length prepared to descend the stairs, and having reached the door of exit, called aloud in her own strong voice, for Mrs. O'Donagough's carriage and servants, while from time to time she requested the still firmly-held Sir Henry to call for them also. But though these calls were ably seconded by the officials around, they were all in vain; no servants, no carriage could be found. For the first five, or perhaps ten, minutes, Mrs. O'Donagough was not displeased with the bustle and the fuss thus occasioned, because she was herself the cause of it; but by degrees, as the fact became more and more evident that there really was no carriage at all in waiting for her, she ceased to swell from dignity, though nature appeared to be carrying on the same

operation within her through the agency of rage. As equipage after equipage drew up for others, while she remained waiting in this desolate condition, the irritation of her feelings caused her repeatedly to run forth, almost under the horses' heels, in order to ascertain by ocular demonstration whether it were indeed possible, that a lady possessing a carriage of her own, with horses, coachman and footman to boot, could possibly be thus abandoned. These repeated *sorties* had for the company present, servants included, the twofold advantage of displaying in the broad light of day her own magnificent figure to the gaze of all, and of rendering Sir Henry's *tête-à-tête* with her daughter almost as remarkable as she could have herself desired.

The poor young man was certainly at his wits' end, and perhaps a little further, for he really felt distracted by the manifold misfortunes which had that morning fallen upon him, and which were not a little aggravated by seeing Sir Edward Stephenson pass by during one of Mrs. O'Donagough's little out-of-door excursions, and stare at him and Patty, as they stood *tête-à-tête* and arm-in-arm together in a corner, with a degree of

astonishment that seemed to deprive him of the power of speaking, for he passed on without addressing him.

At length, however, after every carriage, and every soul belonging to them had been driven away, the long-lost equipage made its appearance, and when Mrs. O'Donagough's vociferous indignation permitted the voices of her servants to be heard, she learnt that they had been employed in the service of Lady Susan Deerwell, who had appeared at the door, summoned them to attend her, and then ordered them to take her home to Green Street.

"Well! that is so like my poor dear Lady Susan!" cried Mrs. O'Donagough, still trembling with rage, "how I will scold her for it! Get in, Patty! Shall I set you down anywhere, Sir Henry?"

"No, I thank you, ma'am," replied the irritated young man, with what seemed to be his last possible effort at concealment of the feelings which had tortured him, and then, slightly touching his hat, he made way for the servant to close the carriage-door, and was out of sight in a moment.

"Ain't I glad she will have her dress to pay

for!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Donagough to Patty, as the carriage drove off.

"And ain't I glad we plagued that conceited Sir Jack as we did!" responded her lively daughter.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RUMOUR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES—A CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEW BETWEEN A MOTHER AND DAUGHTER—A COURAGEOUS RESOLUTION TAKEN, AND ACTED UPON.

A LARGE dinner-party assembled at General Hubert's after the drawing-room, chiefly consisting of family connections, most of whom had that morning paid their compliments at St. James's, and all of whom were amongst the guests invited to Mrs. O'Donagough's ball at night.

There had been too much vexation endured by Mrs. Hubert and her daughter in the morning for either of them willingly to have discussed the cause of it, and if their feelings only had been consulted, the names of Mrs. and Miss O'Donagough would most assuredly never have been mentioned. But Sir Edward Stephenson, who knew nothing of all this, no sooner perceived that the ice-plates were all removed, the grapes duly circulated, and

the door closed upon the last of the attendants, than he said, addressing himself to Mrs. Hubert, at whose right hand he was seated, "I have been excessively vexed to-day, my dear Agnes!"

"Indeed? I am very sorry to hear it," she replied; "may I ask the cause of your vexation, Sir Edward?"

"Yes you may, and I will tell it you frankly. That boy Seymour, whom, notwithstanding all our quarrels, I love as if he were my own son, is most decidedly acting either like a fool or a knave; I cannot tell you half the disappointment and vexation this causes me. I thought him such a noble-hearted fellow, and gave him credit for so intelligent and so refined a mind, that what I have seen to-day, has surprised, as much as it has pained me."

"What is that you are saying, Edward, with so very grave a face?" said General Hubert; "I think I heard something about surprise and pain. Is the communication a secret between you and Agnes? I hope nothing has happened seriously to vex you?"

"Yes, but there has, Hubert," replied Sir Edward, in an accent that showed he was very much in earnest, "but the cause of my

vexation is very far from being a secret now, and even if it were, there is no sort of probability that it should long continue so. There is not one of us, I believe, who has not the honour of knowing Mrs. and Miss O'Donagough, nor is there one who does not know something, more or less, of my late ward, Sir Henry Seymour; therefore, good friends, you are all fully competent to judge of the degree of pleasure with which I should see Sir Henry bestow himself and his noble fortune on the young lady I have just mentioned."

"Nonsense, Sir Edward!" exclaimed the General indignantly; "I too have heard this inconceivably silly report, but I really never expected that I should hear it repeated by you."

"Nor would you, Hubert, had I not this day seen what too strongly confirms it, to leave me the same comfortable conviction of its falsehood which I enjoyed this morning. It was Mucklebury who first told me that the infatuated boy had engaged himself to that tremendous-looking Miss O'Donagough, whose very beauty is revolting, and whom I should have thought completely formed to disgust Seymour, instead of captivating him; for

which reason I ventured rather cavalierly to assure his lordship that he was mistaken, and even when he gravely repeated that he knew the fact from the very best authority, I still wholly disbelieved it. But you know what the adage says on the article of seeing. It is not on the testimony of Lord Mucklebury, or that of any lord or lady breathing, that I would have believed Henry Seymour capable of such preposterous folly; but when I beheld him this morning marching through the crowd at St. James's, with the inconceivable mother on one arm, and the indescribable daughter on the other, I knew not what to think. For must it not be some feeling greatly approaching madness, which could induce such a man as Sir Henry Seymour to make such an exhibition of himself?"

"It was doubtless extremely simple, and extremely civil of him," replied General Hubert, "but it surely is hardly sufficient to justify your belief that he is going to marry the young lady."

"But that is not the worst of it. Where he had been taking them, or what he had been doing with them, Heaven knows; but it was, I should think, nearly an hour after I

had seen the trio pass in the manner I have described, that I at last got down stairs, after having been detained by meeting an old acquaintance from Berlin, whom I had not seen for years, and there, at the bottom of the staircase, in a corner as much as possible out of sight, I found Sir Henry and his fair young friend *tête-à-tête*, long after the great majority of the company had driven off. The girl, too, was hanging on his arm in a sort of familiar way that I cannot bear to think of, because it convinces me that even if he be not fool enough to think of marrying her, he has been wicked enough to make her believe he does."

"And the difference between the two is hardly worth discussion," said Mrs. Hubert, suddenly rising and giving Lady Stephenson the mystical glance which makes it law that all the ladies present should instantly rise too. General Hubert looked surprised at this unusually early retreat. "Are you going to leave us already, Agnes?" said he.

"Yes we are, General, by your good leave," she replied. "The morning has been a fatiguing one for Elizabeth, and I really dare not propose leaving her at home this evening,

therefore I mean to deposit her upon a sofa till it is necessary to attend Mrs. O'Donagough's festivities."

Whether General Hubert's rapid glance towards his daughter when these words were spoken, threw any light upon this movement, might have been doubtful to all but his wife; but she perfectly well understood the feeling that led him without any further questionings to open the door for them, and which caused him as she passed, to snatch her hand, and wring it with strong emotion. Yet Agnes had never, even to him, betrayed her suspicions respecting the feelings of Elizabeth's young heart towards Sir Henry Seymour, nor did he guess them now, to their full extent. But he thought he had seen very decided proofs of admiration on the part of the young man towards his daughter; and though he wished a year or two might elapse, and give them time to know each other, before any thought of marriage was alluded to, he had been for some time watching every trait in his character with deep interest, and had begun to contemplate the idea of a near and dear connexion with him as an event that he should not only approve, but very cordially rejoice in.

Most distasteful therefore was the rumour, which had reached him from more than one quarter, of Sir Henry Seymour's devotion to Miss O'Donagough, and stedfastly did he believe the thing to be impossible, till he saw the effect which the repetition of it produced on his wife. But whatever feelings of vexation and displeasure it might have caused the General to hear such news confirmed, its effect on his wife was much more painful still. She knew, though he did not, that her Elizabeth was no longer "fancy free," and though the conviction of this came too late for any caution on her part to do much good, her anxiety on the subject was lessened, if not altogether removed, by the conviction that the young man was devotedly attached to her, and that he was one to whom she could entrust the happiness of her heart's dearest treasure with confidence. Such being the case, it must be superfluous to state that the report of Sir Henry's attachment to her cousin, had been listened to with a very anxious mixture of fear and incredulity; but, improbable as it appeared to her, so many circumstances had occurred to confirm it, that, when she left the dinner-table, the incredulity

had pretty nearly vanished, while the fear was strengthened almost into certainty. Had it not been, however, for Caroline's strange conduct, and subsequent agitation when the subject was named, Mrs. Hubert would still have been inclined to doubt not only the truth of all she had heard, but also the testimony of Sir Edward's eyes. But her imagination could suggest no other interpretation of Miss Seymour's emotion than that her heart revolted from the connexion her brother was about to form, though her devoted love for him led her to assume a degree of civility towards the young lady, which was altogether foreign to her feelings. During the few days that the poor girl remained in Berkeley Square after the visit of Mrs. O'Donagough and her daughter, she had appeared so dreadfully embarrassed whenever they were spoken of, that the subject had been dropped by Mrs. Hubert from mere pity, and now that she was gone to visit friends at some distance from London, the recollection of all she had said, and all that she seemed ashamed to say, did more to strengthen the report than anything she could have done or said, had she remained with them.

On reaching the hall, Elizabeth took a side candle from the slab, and proceeded with it to her own room; and thither, in a few minutes afterwards, her mother followed.

"You are ill, my dearest child!" said Mrs. Hubert, on perceiving her sitting pale and motionless while large tears were sadly coursing each other down her cheeks; "my darling Elizabeth! tell me what is passing in your mind! Trust me, sweet love! you will feel the better for it."

"Mama! how can I tell you what I am unable to explain even to myself? I would not wish to have a secret from you. If I have been weak and foolish, I would rather you knew it than not, dearest mother! but I cannot tell how it has all come about. I did not think that I could have been—no, and I do not think so now—so very weak, so very foolish, so everything that I should most dislike to be, as to fancy myself in love, and that, too, with a person who was loving another all the time! Oh! mother, your daughter ought not to be so vile as that."

"The vileness does not rest with you, my child," replied Mrs. Hubert, with strong emotion. "You believed yourself beloved,

and had reason to believe it. But this is a theme on which I feel that I must never dare to speak. With you, Elizabeth, the impression will be soon effaced, believe me it will; you shake your head, but you cannot shake my belief, dearest: I speak with perfect confidence. If you have loved this man, it was because he appeared to you, as he did to me, worthy of your love. Now we find he is not so, your feelings towards him will change, and that so completely, as to make you doubt that you ever entertained them."

"That may be. But when shall I forget, mama, that my forward vanity mistook what I suppose was friendship for his sister's friend, for love? It is not my love for him, but my contempt for myself, that will make me miserable."

"You will see this matter in a different light a little while hence, Elizabeth, and that different light will be the true one. But as yet this is perhaps impossible, and I will not harass your spirits now by disputing about it. Perhaps, dearest, it will be best that you should not go to this detestable ball to-night? There are enough of us assembled here, all desperately bent upon the enterprise, to

satisfy the claims of relationship, were she ten times our aunt; indeed, it will be best that you should remain quietly at home."

"It would be a great deal best for my pleasure, mama; but unless you insist upon my staying at home, I had rather go."

"There may be much to try your spirits, my dear child, and it is quite clear they are not very strong to-night. Neither you nor I should choose that anything you may chance to feel should be suspected."

"Trust me!" said Elizabeth beseechingly.

"I will trust you, my sweet girl! you shall go or stay, just as you like best at the moment: there is no occasion to decide about it yet. If I were you, dearest, I would lie down. Claridge can easily arrange your hair again."

Elizabeth silently nodded her assent, and after fondly kissing her pale cheek, her mother left her.

On returning to the drawing-room, Mrs. Hubert found the whole party, consisting of Lady Stephenson, and her sister-in-law Nora, Mrs. Henderson, Elizabeth Peters, and two Miss Nivetts, whom by some of her skilful manœuvrings Mrs. O'Donagough had con-

trived to inscribe on her visiting list, in high, and almost loud debate, concerning the possibility of Sir Henry Seymour's having fallen in love with Miss O'Donagough.

Lady Stephenson gave it as her opinion that all things were possible, but that the thing under discussion was not probable.

Mrs. Henderson observed that after the scene she had witnessed between Miss Seymour and the O'Donagough ladies, she could entertain no doubt whatever of the truth of the report they had heard, inasmuch as the young lady's conduct was perfectly natural upon that theory, and perfectly unintelligible upon every other.

Miss Peters declared that though Mrs. O'Donagough *was* her aunt by marriage, she must say that she thought her more likely than any one she ever knew to take in a young man, and make him marry her daughter, whether he would or no.

The two Miss Nivetts both followed on the same side, first one, and then the other, remarking that nothing occurred so constantly as instances of men being drawn in to marry odious disagreeable women, and exactly the very sort of people they most disliked, by

mere art, and good management; and that was the reason, to their certain knowledge, why so many admirable young women remained single, just because they would not condescend to do the same sort of things themselves. As both these young ladies were considerably past thirty, their judgment had naturally much weight; but notwithstanding this, and all that had preceded it, Mrs. Stephenson scrupled not to raise her silver voice in the glorious minority of one, and to proclaim her positive and complete conviction, that either from knavery and mischief, or from fun and foolery, the report was altogether an invention, having no more foundation in truth than the celebrated error which in ages past had assigned to our humble earth the honoured place of centre to the solar system.

On the appearance of Mrs. Hubert, her opinion was eagerly called for by the whole party; but her answer was more oracular than satisfactory, being summed up in that very safe formula, "Time will show."

An hour or two followed which were wiled away by coffee and criticism. The court circle, as a matter of course, passed under a general review, and then, for the gratification

of Mrs. Henderson and her sister, the only ladies present who had not been that day at St. James's, Mrs. Stephenson entered upon a very graphic description of the dress and appearance of Mrs. O'Donagough and her daughter, observing that as all present were either her relations, or her relations' relations, there could be no sort of objection to her speaking with unaffected truth of the general effect produced by them upon all beholders. By this time the gentlemen had joined the party, and many a burst of irresistible laughter from Frederic Stephenson, attested his continued enjoyment of his pretty wife's powers of persiflage, though he ceased not to protest all the time that he did not at all approve quizzing the O'Donagoughs, that O'Donagough himself was a capital good fellow, and that he meant to invite them all to dinner, to meet Seymour, very soon.

At length the clock struck twelve.

"The carriages have been waiting a long time, Agnes," said the General, "and if we intend to go at all, I think we must go now."

The whole party declared themselves to be perfectly ready, but where was Elizabeth?

"Wait for us one moment!" said Mrs.

Hubert, as she left the room to inquire how her daughter had decided. It was with a very gentle hand that Agnes opened the bedroom door, for she was not without hopes that she should find her child asleep. "Had she decided upon going," thought she, "we should have seen her in the drawing-room ere this." But she was mistaken. Elizabeth was seated, fully prepared for the ball, her dress no otherwise differing from that of the morning than by the removal of the train and plume. She was reading, and her beautiful features showed no traces of their recent emotion.

"You mean to go then, my dear love?" said her mother.

"Yes, mama! I am quite ready," she replied; and quickly wrapping her shawl about her, she set forth upon an expedition which any one, who could have known what was passing in her heart, must have allowed required more courage than the mounting many a "deadly breach" has done.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE.

THOUGH for some cause, which it is reasonable to suppose was originated by the retiring timidity of his nature, Mr. O'Donagough did not himself go to court, he was nevertheless exceedingly anxious to receive a full and true description of all that had befallen his lady and their daughter there, and accordingly was in waiting, together with the Misses Perkins, to receive them on their return.

"Where the deuce have you been staying all this time?" demanded Mr. O'Donagough the instant his wife's portly person was within the library door. For in that sanctum, the only spot uninvaded by preparations for the ball, were the party to dine, and, with the exception of the dear interval of dressing, recreate themselves till their company arrived.

"What in the world have you been about?" reiterated Mr. O'Donagough.

"Why part of the time, my dear, we have been in the presence of Her Most Gracious Majesty, by whom we were received in the most flattering manner possible. I am sure I quite longed to stay and talk to her, she looked so very obliging. Well, and part of the time we were with all the rest of the fine folks, you know—seeing, and being seen, Donny, and I know one young lady by sight, at any rate, who was pretty tolerably admired, I can tell you. I never did see a girl stared at as Patty was—that's the fact. God knows I don't want to flatter her, and make her vain, for I hate it like poison. I never was vain myself, and I trust my daughter will follow in the same path. But truth is truth, and there was not a man could pass her without turning round, and having another look."

"I am not greatly surprised at that, my dear!" replied Mr. O'Donagough, looking very complacently at his glittering daughter. "Patty was a devilish fine girl when she was dressed with no finery at all, to speak of; and I can't say but what she looks all the better for what she has got on now. It would have been rather strange if the people had not looked at her, I think."

"Strange!" exclaimed Miss Matilda, "it would have been downright unnatural! You do look beautiful to-day Patty, and there's no good in denying it, even to your face. So don't be angry, my dear, for I can't help it."

"Well then, if the truth *is* to be told," said Miss Louisa, "I won't be afraid to give my opinion, even before it is asked, and I must say that never in my life did I see Mrs. O'Donagough look so beautifully well as she does to-day. My goodness! how those feathers do become her, to be sure!"

After a few more delightful moments, such as these, Patty and Matilda ran up stairs, leaving Mrs. O'Donagough to explain at length the jocose manœuvre of her noble friend, which had occasioned her late return.

"Well, Patty! tell me all. Did you enjoy it?" was the opening of the *tête-à-tête* in the fair debutante's bed-room.

"Enjoy it? I am sure I can hardly tell whether I did or not. It was all done in such a flurry. Of course I liked to see the people looking at me, and for once in her life, mama told the truth, for upon my honour and life Matilda, I don't think that there was one man passed, unless perhaps it was some very old

ones indeed, who did not turn his head round to look at me. And they were all, I suppose, dukes and lords, or else baronets, at the very least. And that is not like being stared at in a common way, you know."

"I think not indeed," replied her friend, with great energy. "There's many a girl may get a good stare from people at the playhouse, you know, or anything of that sort, who would never get a single look from a lord. But I should think, Patty, that you were exactly the sort of girl to produce a great effect at court. Because you know that when there is such a quantity of rank and fashion, as the papers say, all brought together in a crowd, nobody that was not something particularly striking could hope to be looked at at all. I always have said there was something uncommonly striking in you. But you have not told me half yet. Did you see many people that you knew?"

"Yes! we saw the Stephensons and the Huberts—and there was another that I saw too, that I plagued well, I'll be hanged if I didn't—nasty false-hearted villain as he is!"

"You don't mean Sir Jack, do you?"

"Yes, but I do though, and I would plague and torment him into his grave if I did but

know the way, and dance over it, with you know who, Matilda, when I had got him there. You'll stare, perhaps, when I tell you that I got hold of his sirship's arm, and made my beau of him for an hour and a half by any watch in christendom. And didn't I hold him tight? I do believe, at the very bottom of my heart, that he would have had me in the middle of the Red Sea, if he could."

"Nonsense, Patty! why should he have given you his arm, if he wanted so bad to get rid of you?"

"Why?—ask mama that, Matilda. She *did* manage it capital to be sure! But she didn't know one half-quarter the delight I took in it for all that. She don't see so far into a millstone as I do, and though I don't much think she herself believes all the lies she is so fond of telling about his being still my lover, I am quite sure that she has got no notion of what else he's after. But I have, Matilda. He is in love now, or pretending to be in love, (which is much the same thing to him, good-for-nothing villain,) with my whey-faced cousin Elizabeth. And I'll just ask you to guess how well pleased he was at being made, absolutely made, Matilda, to let go both Miss and Madam Hubert,

in order to take mama and me in tow, instead of them. Oh! it was capital fun, I promise you, and I 'll have some more of it to-night, or I 'll know the reason why. But I won't talk any more about it now, Matilda, for I am as hungry as a hound, and I won't be plagued all through dinner time with fearing to spoil my lovely pink satin. A spot of grease you know would just be murder. I know how I eat when I 'm hungry. I 'm not one of your mincing misses that 's afraid to enjoy their food, for fear of spoiling either their gown, or their complexion, or their gentility. But I 'll just make free with my finery, and cover it all up upon the bed till it 's time to put it on again for the ball. You must help me to take it off, Matilda, for our lady's-maid is over head and ears in business about the supper. 'Twill be such a glorious supper, Matilda! won't we enjoy it after the waltzing?"

Everything being of course out of joint throughout the mansion on this important day, Mr. O'Donagough and the four ladies sat down to dinner in the library at five o'clock, and from that hour till eight enjoyed themselves in all the luxury of the most unceremonious deshabille, eating, drinking, and planning improve-

ments for all the great and little glories of the coming night.

But when the clock struck eight Patty started up, exclaiming, "Now then, Matilda, let us be off. There are four of us to dress, and only one maid to do it all. Just let's have a look at the ball-room as we go by. As to the supper, there's no getting a peep at that, without having mama too, for the door has been locked up ever since nine o'clock this morning, but I got in once though, before they could turn the key, and saw sights I can tell you. Such a trifle, Matilda! and no less than four tipsy cakes!"

While taking their look at the ball-room, and admiring all the arrangements for lighting and decoration, which like everything else performed by Mr. O'Donagough at this period of his existence, was done upon a scale of great expense, Patty seized her friend Matilda by the waist, and began dragging her round the room in a waltz.

"Don't you long for it to begin?" said she, stopping at length to recover breath.

"Yes, I should, Patty," replied Matilda in a plaintive voice, "notwithstanding all I have suffered, I really do think I should enjoy it, if—"

"If what?" demanded Patty, whirling herself round and round before a glass.

"Why—if I was as sure of having partners as you are. Girls at home are always sure to get the pick of the market!"

"As *I* am," replied Patty with an expressive wink. "I can't say anything about that, my dear; I rather think I *am* tolerably sure of a partner to waltz with to-night. However, I'll promise one thing, and that is, that you shall be served with second best."

"Darling girl!" exclaimed Miss Matilda with sudden animation. "Any body that suffered themselves to be out of spirits and unhappy with you, would never deserve to have a friend. I don't believe that there ever was such a dear kind creature as you are! You may depend upon one thing, Patty, that I will stand by you through thick and thin, let what will come. You havn't said a word yet, have you?"

"No, not I—the best time of course must be when they have hundreds of eyes upon them, for they can't fly out, then, you know, let them wish it ever so much. Trust me, Matilda, I'm the girl for a plot, and you see if I don't carry it through. But not a word; up

stairs for your life—come along! it's full time to begin beautifying."

Interesting as were the scenes which followed, and amusingly diversified as they were by the runnings in and runnings out of those engaged in them, from Mrs. O'Donagough's room to Patty's, and from Patty's room to Mrs. O'Donagough's, they must not be narrated at length. The two Miss Perkinses were in greater raptures than ever at the uncommon becomingness of everything Mrs. O'Donagough and Patty put on, and were rewarded for their good taste by having the loan of sundry ornamental baubles bestowed upon them. Everything is comparative; and the magnificent Mrs. O'Donagough and her daughter, in all their courtly trappings, scarcely entered the ball-room more completely satisfied with their own appearance, than did Miss Louisa in a yellow silk dress, set off by a prodigiously massive set of garnets belonging to Mrs. O'Donagough, while her head was admirably arranged with a few flowers, a few curls, and one little red plume, all from the stores of the same liberal lady. The gentle and now revived Matilda wore her white dress, adorned at every possible corner with blue bows and white beads, which had

once decorated the charms of her generous Patty.

At length they were all complete! Each passed in review before each, and each declared that each was perfect.

"Now then, let us all go down stairs!" said Mrs. O'Donagough. The ball-room was by this time lighted up, and blazed away in all the mingled glory of lamps and wax lights.

"Well then, I never *did* see anything so beautiful!" exclaimed the two Miss Perkinses at once.

They found Mr. O'Donagough and his friend Foxcroft employed in giving with their own hands the last finish to the attractions of the third drawing-room, which though last and least of the suite of rooms, was by no means either as to their importance in the consideration of their present owner.

Some people may suppose that such social meetings as the present between Mr. Foxcroft and Miss Matilda Perkins must have been awkward, and that even the tranquil-minded Miss Louisa might have felt in some degree embarrassed by his presence. But such persons know not Mr. Foxcroft. There was a quiet, hard, dry audacity about him, which

served his purpose as well as the purest self-approving innocence; and so admirably did he sustain the demeanour of a slight, but very respectful acquaintance to both the ladies, that for very shame they could not testify emotion before the eyes of one so incapable of sharing it. There was therefore no drawback whatever to the exhilarating brightness of the scene, nor to the throb of satisfaction with which the first thundering knock at the door was welcomed by all. Another followed, and another, and another, so closely, that even the practised looker-on, Louisa, could hardly have ventured to specify which of the many guests came first.

It was not long before the business of the third drawing-room commenced; not indeed that most important part of it, for the bringing on of which the whole costly entertainment was arranged, but such little skirmishing affairs as sometimes mark the coming on of a battle on which hangs much.

The plan of Mr. O'Donagough, boldly conceived, and carried into execution with as strict adherence to his Parisian model as the manners of the country would permit, had answered perfectly. The name of Stephenson had certainly helped him in some quarters, and that of Hu-

bert in others; but it is probable that he would have done all he wanted without either. A few tolerably good dinners, with tolerably good wine *à discrétion*, and the power of playing high, playing low, or not playing at all, which followed them, had made it easier than some genuine gentlefolks may deem probable for Mr. Allen O'Donagough to make up both his dinner table, and his card table, very greatly to his satisfaction. But such a mode of life as he was now pursuing was not entered into upon any idle speculation of enjoying a gay existence while it lasted, and just winning enough to keep himself clear of ruin when it should be over. From the first hour of its conception, up to the very important epoch at which he had now arrived, one object had been ever steadily before him, namely, the making prey of some rich unwary novice, whose ruin should establish him in idleness and luxury for ever. On first becoming acquainted with Sir Henry Seymour in his real character, he for a short time really believed Patty's positive assurances that the young gentleman was her lover, and intended to be her husband; which violent improbability could only have been received as truth by such a man as O'Donagough, from his overweening

admiration of his daughter's beauty. But the being present at a very few interviews between them sufficed to open his eyes to the real state of the case, and he quickly atoned to himself for the gross and stupid blunder of which he had been guilty, by dooming the young whist-loving baronet to the expiation of all his falsehood in love, by the surrender of all his fortune at play. Mr. O'Donagough, however, had yet another blunder to acknowledge in his estimate of Sir Henry Seymour's character. His losing an occasional rubber at whist, when playing at five guinea points, was no surer proof of his being a probable victim to the maddening orgies of the gaming table, than his having kissed Miss Patty was of his intention to convert her into Lady Seymour. And this blunder too, Mr. O'Donagough found out, without any very long delay; but he found out two other things also; first, that the highly connected young baronet made an excellent decoy duck to his evening parties, it being quite enough to mention *ça et là*, that he was one of the whist party, to guarantee the perfect respectability of the *rather* high play sometimes found there. The other discovery taught him, that whatever advantages the company of Sir Henry Seymour

brought were, and ever would be, at his command, so long as the ill-advised young man continued to tremble at the idea of Sir Edward Stephenson's becoming acquainted with the fact of his mad-cap voyage to Sydney.

With this he had manœuvred very skilfully —never pushing his troublesome friendship so far as to make the young man desperate; in which state he might have been tempted to do the wisest thing possible, and have opened the whole of his hot-headed, but essentially harmless proceeding to Sir Edward. But to this he had never yet been driven; and having been made perfectly aware by the admirable tactics of Mr. O'Donagough, that he was *not* expected to be in love with Patty, he scrupled not to remain on very civil visiting terms with the whole family, which, with its chief, assumed something like a tone of intimacy from the secret which existed between them.

But though foiled in his hopes of becoming master of the broad lands of Sir Henry Seymour, Mr. O'Donagough had not stood the heavy charges of two London seasons in vain. He had made money, a great deal of money, considerably more than he had expended, and that too, quietly and snugly, without any *éclat*

or disagreeable gossip whatever. But the time for which he had all along quietly waited, was now come; and the night of the day on which his wife and his daughter had been presented at court, the night on which his house was to be sanctified by the presence of many persons, not only of high condition, but of high character, was chosen by him as that on which his great *tour de force* was to be made.

Among many young men with whom he had made acquaintance at the various clubs to which he had contrived to get admitted, was one on whose fair low forehead nature had written *gullible* in characters not to be mistaken. No sooner did Mr. O'Donagough look in the face of this personage than he sought and obtained an introduction to him. His next care was to ascertain who, and what he was; and having learnt upon satisfactory authority that the youth had just thrown off the odious control of a brace of guardians, and that he was in undisputed and uncontrolled possession of a fine estate, than he cultivated his acquaintance with an assiduity that left the young gentleman very little chance of escaping his friendship.

This doomed person, whose name was Ro-

naldson, no longer a conny Scotsman however, whatever his forefathers might have been, was one of those unfortunate, but often amiable, individuals, who are born without the capability of uttering the monosyllable No. He was not very wise certainly, but there are hundreds of weaker intellect than Mr. Ronaldson, who go through life without making any very remarkable blunder, merely because they have the power of pronouncing it, and are capable upon occasion of exclaiming, Such "a word in due season, how good is it!"

But poor Robert Ronaldson had no such power, and when he was asked to dinner, he dined; and when he was asked to play cards, he did play cards; and when he was asked to bet, he did bet,—high bets, low bets, or middling bets, precisely according to the invitation given, and regulated by no other law whatever.

The three or four thousand pounds which Mr. O'Donagough had already won from this unfortunate young man, had but whetted his appetite; and there was such an ungrumbling *sans-souciance* in the manner in which he drew his cheques, that the operation of ruining him completely, seemed peculiarly fitted for, and

suitable to, such a remarkably good-natured man as Mr. O'Donagough was generally declared to be; so that, in a word, the complete fleecing of Mr. Robert Ronaldson was decided upon between Mr. O'Donagough, and his chief clerk of the works, Mr. Foxcroft; and the evening of Mrs. O'Donagough's grand ball, fixed on as the time for performing it.

Mr. Ronaldson was not quite the first, but very far from being the last, of the invited guests who arrived. Dancing, though it had not yet reached the height of waltzing, was begun, and a somewhat stiff and sober quadrille was being walked through, as a sort of prologue to the evening's amusement.

O'Donagough had not yet played himself, though for nearly an hour past a steady party had been at work in the third room, of whom Foxcroft was one. When Mr. Ronaldson arrived, therefore, he found the master of the mansion lounging about, and criticizing the ladies with an air of the most perfect *nonchalance* and *bon ton.*

"Ah! Ronaldson! How are you? are you a dancer?" adding, however, before the young man had time to answer, "not you, I'll answer for it. You understand life better than that,

Ronaldson; nothing but the Johnny Raws are seduced into so very laborious a process for the mere gratification of looking at pretty faces, and pretty feet."

"Why, to say the truth, I do not very often dance. It is not half so amusing as a game at cards."

"I don't think it is," replied O'Donagough, in a tone of great indifference; "however, I can't let you play cards now, because there really are a monstrous number of fine girls here, and we must give them a look. Come with me to that corner, Ronaldson, we shall find it a very snug look-out."

The facile young man followed him to the place he indicated, and began looking at the ladies as he was told to do. Having got him there, however, Mr. O'Donagough made no great exertions to amuse him, merely saying from time to time, "Mercy on me! what a crowd we shall have! It will be perfectly stifling," which words, accompanied by many expressive yawns, and a frequent shifting of the weight from one leg to the other, speedily produced the intended effect on his companion, who began to yawn likewise, and to declare in a tone not the least in the world expressive of

pleasure, that there was a very great crowd indeed.

"And not a chair to be hoped for!" exclaimed O'Donagough. "For mercy's sake, my dear fellow, don't let us stay here, stuck up for show, like deals in a timber-yard. Upon my soul I cannot stand it—nor *stand* any longer. Let us see if we cannot do better in one of the other rooms."

To the second drawing-room they repaired accordingly, and a very narrow cane bench being fortunately disengaged, they seated themselves upon it, having before them a pleasant peep now and then across the crowd, of the snug comforts of the card-room, where the chairs and sofas were of the most luxurious form possible.

"Is there any reason why we should not go into the card-room now, O'Donagough?" demanded Mr. Ronaldson, after having enjoyed the luxury of the cane bench for about ten minutes.

"Not if you wish it, certainly. Heaven knows I should prefer it myself, for it is the only place that looks comfortable; but as this is the first dance you have ever been at here, I thought I must do the honours. But you are

something like me, I believe, and have no great taste for such Tom fooleries." And so saying, his attentive host now led the way to the soft sofas, easy chairs, and quiet rubber of the third room.

Ronaldson threw himself into a delightful *bergère* at the corner of the whist-table, and for some time seemed to amuse himself exceedingly well by watching the progress of the game, but at length he was again seen to yawn, upon which Mr. O'Donagough, who had been in the room a little, and out of the room a little, and in short, doing everything that looked the least like being anxious to play, said as he again drew near to him, "Don't you think, Ronaldson, we might contrive to make up another table? As you don't dance, you will find it monstrous stupid if you don't play."

"I should like it of all things," replied Ronaldson, "if you think you can be spared from the ball-room."

"Oh faith! I've done my duty there. But I don't see a soul likely to play a real good rubber, such as you and I enjoy. Let us have a game at Piquet, Ronaldson?"

"I shall like that better than whist," replied

the young man, "for I am a better match for you there."

"You have found that out, have you?" said O'Donagough, laughing. "You are quite right, certainly, but never mind. If I lose at Piquet with you, I'll win at whist with somebody else. It all comes wonderfully even at the end of the year."

Within five minutes after he had pronounced these words, Mr. Allen O'Donagough found himself placed at the very identical little table, in the precise chair, in the precise corner of the room, with exactly the degree of light, and no more, and exactly the same companion, and no other, that he had planned and predetermined, at least three months before.

The progress of the game varied but little from what pretty generally happens upon such occasions. From the time they began playing, till the majority of the company began moving down stairs to supper, Mr. Ronaldson won every game, with the exception of two, which he was permitted to lose, that the stimulant of variety might not be altogether wanting. When the word *supper*, however, caught the ears of the young man, who, notwithstanding his exhilarating good fortune, was by that time very

seriously hungry, he hinted a wish to follow in the train that was still pouring through the doors; but Mr. O'Donagough, who seemed vexed and irritated by his continued losses, said, "No! upon my soul, Ronaldson! That is not fair, you have won pretty well every game, and now you are for carrying off the spoil without giving me even a chance of revenge."

This accusation startled, and somewhat nettled the young man, who, with all his defects, was not in the least degree disposed to take an unfair advantage of any one.

"Upon my honour, O'Donagough, I had no such idea," he replied very gravely. "I will play after supper as long as you like, and for what you like, but in simple truth, I am very hungry."

"Foxcroft! your table is up, is it not?" cried O'Donagough, to his faithful and observant friend.

"Yes! they are all off to the supper-table," replied the accomplished minister.

"Then do you be off to the supper-table too, my good fellow, and see that Richardson brings us up a tray worth having, with a flask or two of Champagne; it's your deal, Ronald-

son. There is nothing I abominate like standing about in a supper-room, pushed right and left by a hundred hungry and thirsty women, who never dream that any one can want anything but themselves. You will do fifty times better here, Ronaldson, you may depend on it."

"Likely enough," replied his easy companion. "Give me half a chicken, and a glass of Champagne, and I'll play all night, if you like it."

Meanwhile, the more ostensible business of the meeting was going on in an equally satisfactory manner in the ball-room. The party, which was really large and brilliant, assembled with fewer exceptions from disappointments and excuses than might have been expected, and the whirling waltz went on greatly to the satisfaction of Patty; and now and then, of Matilda too, for about one set in four she was blessed with a partner by a sudden fit of recollection in her devoted friend. At a little after midnight, Mrs. Hubert and her daughter, together with the whole party who had dined with them, entered the rooms. General Hubert was prevented from accompanying them by a gentleman, who, having called upon him very late in the evening upon business of im-

portance, still remained with him in his library, when the rest of the party set off for Mrs. O'Donagough's; but he sent down a slip of paper to his wife, on which was written in pencil, "I shall come to Curzon Street the moment I am at liberty—send back the carriage for me."

Mrs. Hubert, and the party which entered with her, could not have made their appearance in any *salon* in Europe without producing *a sensation*, and it may easily be imagined that Mrs. O'Donagough was not sparing in her efforts to circulate the fact of their very near relationship to herself. Of all her glorious day, this was decidedly the most glorious moment, and perhaps in her own heart she might have felt a sort of undefined consciousness that she had reached her culminating point, for as she looked round upon the grand display of lights, and flowery decorations—as she listened to the gay strains of Strauss—as she marked the grand display of dancing elegance that floated round her—and finally, as she gazed upon the graceful array of distinguished relatives as they walked up the room, she heaved a deep-drawn sigh as if overpowered by the fulness of her contentment.

Sir Henry Seymour had been for some time in the room, and joined Lady Stephenson, Mrs. Hubert, and their train, the moment they appeared. But of all that fair host, there was but one who met him kindly, nay, even that one felt in her heart of hearts that he was unworthy, and though, when she remarked that all looked upon him coldly, a sort of relenting softness led her still to greet him as a friend, she would have better liked that the state of things should have been reversed, and that, as heretofore, he should have been welcomed by the smiles of all, so that she might have been released from the sort of pitying necessity of being civil. But this state of things endured but a short time; he immediately asked her to dance, and though she agreed to do so, merely because she knew not how to avoid it, her judgment of him was completely changed before the measure ended.

Little as Sir Henry Seymour had hitherto given his friends reason to admire his deliberative wisdom, he had been for some time past giving proofs of it, though they knew it not, which might well entitle him to respect. He had loved Elizabeth, young as she was, almost from the first moment he had renewed ac-

quaintance with her after his return from Australia. This, however, was not till they met in Paris, about a year after the departure of the Hubert family from Brighton. But the feeling she inspired was not at that period, at least, such as altogether to cast out fear. He remembered that the guardian he had so grievously offended was by marriage her uncle, and though the reconciliation between them was perfect, he dreaded lest the harem-scarem reputation of his boyhood might become an impediment to the dearest hope of his life. For this reason he very wisely determined to look and love for a while longer, and though in spite of all his resolutions he certainly had betrayed, both to Elizabeth and Elizabeth's watchful friends, the secret of his heart, he had never, till this eventful evening, breathed a word which could be fairly construed into a confession of love.

But now, though the time of his self-imposed probation was not yet over, he could no longer restrain the impulse which urged him at once to avow his wishes, and receive his doom. More circumstances than one led him to this. The evident sensation produced among the critical crowd at St. James's that morning

by the appearance of Elizabeth, had sent a qualm of terror to his heart, from the idea that she must inevitably be asked in marriage by half the peerage. In addition to this misery, came the outrage to his feelings produced by Mrs. O'Donagough's public seizure of him, and his consequent enforced desertion of all he most loved, for all he most disliked; and, to crown all, he was by no means slow to perceive in the altered eyes of his friends, when he presented himself to them in Mrs. O'Donagough's drawing-room, that he had offended them, as he could not doubt, by his involuntary share in the adventures of the morning.

The resolution upon which he had been pondering from the moment he had bowed himself away from the carriage-door of Mrs. O'Donagough, became at that moment fixed and unchangeable. He had endured to linger with very tolerable philosophy on the threshold of happiness, but to see himself thrust from it in consequence of his presumed attachment to the O'Donagough race, was beyond his strength. He determined not to leave the room till he had asked Elizabeth Hubert to be his wife—and he determined too, that should her answer be favourable, he would not live twenty-four

hours longer without exonerating himself from the intolerable thraldom of feeling at the mercy of Mr. O'Donagough, by confessing both to Sir Edward and the General the whole history of his foolish masquerading expedition to Australia.

In both these resolutions he was quite right; and for all the wisdom of the first of them he was speedily rewarded by the beautiful simplicity with which Elizabeth permitted him to read her innocent young heart. How far the closing of that day was unlike its opening, to both of them, may be very safely left to conjecture, while the narrative turns to scenes of rather a different character, which were going on at no great distance from them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DISCOVERY AND AN ELOPEMENT.

THERE was, besides Elizabeth, one other person of Mrs. Hubert's party who entered the rooms with a spirit pre-occupied, and nevertheless awake in no common degree to a feeling of deep interest, concerning all that might chance to pass there. This person was Mrs. Stephenson. From the time she had met Mrs. O'Donagough at the house of her father, this lively lady had been labouring without intermission to obtain intelligence respecting the source of her newly-acquired wealth, together with every particular possible to be got at, respecting the position and manner of life of Mr. O'Donagough. Having an extremely clever lady's maid, and a saucy French page, who could have worked his way through

a deal board as readily as a gimlet, had he expected to find either mischief or profit behind it,—having two such functionaries, both very devotedly attached to her, and bound in all ways to do her bidding, it is not, perhaps, very extraordinary that she contrived to obtain a few hints which confirmed her in the belief that good Mr. Willoughby's suggestion of a large fortune having fallen into the possession of Mr. O'Donagough was less probable than desirable. In short, she came to the house fully aware that high play was carried on there, and was much inclined to suspect that Sir Henry Seymour's intimacy in the family was owing to this. With a great deal of warm-hearted good feeling, Nora had also a little of that species of animated interest in the affairs of those she loved, which sometimes leads to interference more active than judicious. Most women loving and trusting a husband, as completely as she loved and trusted hers, would have confided all their suspicions to him, and trusted to his management, the delicate task of discovering whether the man she had wished to see the husband of her niece was undeserving this happiness, either from his being a gambler, or an inconstant. But no, Mrs. Stephenson very

greatly preferred managing the whole matter herself, and, excepting her maid and her page, no living being had the slightest suspicion of what she had got in her head.

For a short time after Seymour and Elizabeth had stood up side by side for the purpose of walking about a little, and talking a good deal to the various airs of a quadrille, Mrs. Stephenson took the trouble of moving from one side of the room to the other, and back again, and then a little on one side, and then a little on the other, in order to ascertain whether they appeared to be on the same sort of terms together which she had formerly remarked with so much satisfaction. It was not very long before she became perfectly satisfied on this point, and then she determined to take advantage of having completely separated herself from her party in order to penetrate to the card room, and make her own observations upon what she might find there, without being interrupted by anybody.

The crowd that filled the rooms, and which at that time was at its height, prevented this manœuvre from being remarked by any individual of her own party. Frederic was not there: for Mr. O'Donagough, having long ago

ascertained that he was not a playing man, had gradually, as his connection increased with those who were, made himself less agreeable, and less observant, so that the acquaintance began at Brighton, would have been a decided bore in London, had it not tacitly died away by mutual concert. Without any interruption whatever, therefore, the enterprising Nora made her way across the first room, through the second, and into the third, till she found herself within a few feet of Mr. O'Donagough, Mr. Ronaldson, their snug little table, and their very quiet game of piquet. She perceived a considerable quantity of gold upon the table, which surprised her not, but it did surprise her to observe that it was the simple looking young man who constantly won every game, while her strongly suspected acquaintance Mr. O'Donagough as constantly lost without manifesting any symptom of vexation, or indeed of emotion of any kind. Beside Mr. Ronaldson, and immediately opposite O'Donagough stood Mr. Foxcroft. To Mrs. Stephenson this gentleman was totally a stranger, nor would his appearance in any way have attracted her attention, had she not observed that a slight smile, which he sought to conceal by passing his hand across

his mouth, was perceptible each time that the elder gentleman counted over a handful of sovereigns to the younger one. She was quite sure too by the direction of the eyes of both, that whatever thoughts produced this smile were in common between Mr. O'Donagough and the gaunt figure from whom it proceeded, though nothing in the slightest degree approaching to an answering smile could be perceived on the well-regulated features of the former.

It was just as she had observed this for the third time, and that some vague notion not altogether unlike the truth was growing into very shrewd suspicion in the mind of Mrs. Stephenson, that she felt her arm touched by some one beside her, and looking round, perceived Elizabeth Peters staring at Mr. O'Donagough very earnestly, while at the same time she was calling her attention with more familiarity than their acquaintance warranted.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Stephenson," she said, "but will you be so kind as to tell me the name of that gentleman opposite?"

"It is the master of the house—Mr. O'Donagough."

"O'Donagough?" repeated Miss Peters in

a cautious whisper, "Indeed, Mrs. Stephenson, that is not his real name."

At any other time it is possible that this abrupt contradiction from a person very nearly a stranger to her might have obtained from Mrs. Stephenson a look of offended surprise and nothing more; but in the present state of her mind, nothing could be more certain of commanding her attention than such a communication as this. She immediately passed her arm under that of Miss Peters, and silently drew her through the crowd till they reached the landing place on the top of the stairs; there, comparatively speaking, they were alone, and Mrs. Stephenson after mounting a step or two of the ascending flight for greater security, turned to her surprised companion, and said in a tone of the deepest interest, "Tell me, Miss Peters, for mercy's sake tell me instantly what it is you mean by the words you just now spoke to me."

"I mean, Mrs. Stephenson, that unless I am a great deal more mistaken than ever I was in my whole life before, that person whom you say is the master of the house is Major Allen, a man that I knew very well at Clifton very nearly twenty years ago."

Never certainly did any lady in the act of weaving a romance, and elucidating a mystery, receive a piece of intelligence more well-timed, or more completely german to the subject of her thoughts.

"My dear Miss Peters!" she exclaimed, catching the hand of her companion, and fervently clasping it, "Are you indeed convinced, fully convinced, of the truth of what you now assert? It is no idle curiosity which makes me ask you this; your answer is of real importance."

"Indeed Mrs. Stephenson I am, and I would not say it, unless I was quite sure."

"But how can we account for no other persons having recognised him? Did not Agnes know that Major Allen? and I well remember hearing Mr. Stephenson, and the General also, talk over that same season at Clifton of which you must now be speaking, and naming him in a manner that proved they must have known him personally. I think, Miss Peters, that it is impossible."

"It is not impossible at all, Mrs. Stephenson," replied Elizabeth Peters. "I well remember that neither Agnes nor either of the gentlemen you name, ever spoke to him at all;

whereas I was the person to whom he always addressed himself. I was very young then, and did not find out till afterwards that he was not so gentlemanlike a person as he pretended to be. But I was more with my aunt Barnaby than any of them, and this man was certainly making love to her, though it did not come to anything *then*. You may depend upon it that what I say is true—I remember every feature in his face, but most particularly I remember a wart that he has on the left temple, which the wig that he wears now is intended, I suppose, to cover, but while I stood looking at him he wiped his forehead with his pocket handkerchief, and just pushed back the hair, so that I saw it perfectly. I was very sure it was Major Allen before that, but of course I could not have any doubt afterwards."

"And he calls himself Allen O'Donagough!" exclaimed Mrs. Stephenson in the softest of whispers, and suddenly feeling perfectly convinced of the fact. "Nothing was ever so fortunate as my meeting you here, my dear Miss Peters. You will not I am sure refuse to assist me in the project I am bent upon, of completely unmasking this detestable man. It would be a very righteous thing to do it, even

without any personal motive—but I have many. Will you then return with me to the card room —remain close to me—and without attracting attention, even by a whisper, let us both carefully watch what is going on. You have already proved that you have a keen eye—I am not *quite* blind myself, and with your help, and that of my eye-glass, I fully expect to see something worth noting."

Exceedingly well pleased to find herself of more consequence than usual, Elizabeth Peters expressed her readiness to do anything that Mrs. Stephenson wished; and once more linked arm in arm, they re-entered the card-room together. By the time they recovered their position near the little piquet table, a murmur about "going down to supper" began to make itself heard, and a movement was already perceptible among the crowd. Silently pressing the arm of her companion, Mrs. Stephenson very skilfully fell back, as if pressed upon by the passing throng, and ensconced herself and Miss Peters in a draperied recess, which contained a sofa, and which might, by letting the curtains drop, be made exactly to correspond in appearance with the one window of the apartment, giving to the irregular room

the advantageous effect of two windows, instead of one, and a niche. During the long consultations which had been held between Mrs. O'Donagough and her friend Louisa, concerning the most advantageous manner of setting off her "beautiful rooms" for this great occasion, nothing had detained them so long as this puzzling recess. Miss Louisa was very strongly of opinion that the general effect of the three rooms altogether would be a great deal indeed more grand, by making it appear that there were two regular handsome windows in the card-room. Whereas Mrs. O'Donagough herself, remembering perhaps the days of Silverton and Captain Tate, declared that nothing could look so inviting as that pretty sofa with the draperies festooned before it. At length the amiable wife exclaimed, "We will ask Donny about it." And Miss Louisa was accordingly dispatched to the study to invite the master of the house to the consultation.

"Well Mr. O'D. what do you say to it?" demanded his wife after fairly stating the *pros* and *cons*.

"It had much better look like a window at once, my dear," he replied. "I don't want people to be *tempted* as you call it, into sitting

in this room at all. Nobody can enjoy a game at cards unless the room is quiet, and though I know just at first that the people will be pushing in and out, I am determined to have a quiet hour or two after supper, and I shall just lock the door, you may depend upon it."

"That is just as you please, my dear," answered his wife gaily. "By that time all the people will have seen that we have *got* three rooms, and of course that's all I care about it."

"Very well then, that's all right, but I'd rather you would make the recess look merely like a window if you can." And so the discussion ended, Mrs. O'Donagough very obediently arranging the curtains of the window and the recess exactly alike. But about half an hour before the company began to arrive, while Mr. O'Donagough was giving some last instructions to Foxcroft in the library, and while the two Miss Perkinses and Patty were still indulging in some last looks, last pins, and last pinches before their looking-glasses above, the highly-delighted mistress of the fête beguiled those moments of expectation by walking backwards and forwards through what she loved to call her suit of rooms, and pushing

a bench an inch one way, and pulling a chair an inch that, in the idle attempt to improve what her heart told her was already perfect. In the course of these repeated promenades, it occurred to her that the appearance both of the real window, and the fictitious one would be greatly more elegant, were their draperies partially drawn up, disclosing in the one case a small portion of a coloured blind which she greatly admired, and in the other a *very* slight peep into her beloved recess, which though not sufficient to induce anybody to penetrate its darkness, nevertheless might give the idea of some addition to the extent, of which she was so particularly proud. This last improvement completed her labours of preparation, for the three ladies from above entered the room immediately after, and their admiration of her and her rooms, and her admiration of them and their dresses, left no time for any more finishing touches, before the company began to arrive.

It was, then, into this dark recess that Mrs. Stephenson and her assistant conspirator slid, unobserved of any, during the interesting moment when all but the piquet players were pressing forward to supper. A slight touch of the finger caused one of the curtains to drop

entirely, and behind this shelter they seated themselves, having by the partial elevation of the other a perfect view of the persons whose proceedings they were about to watch.

They heard Mr. Ronaldson's petition for supper, and Mr. O'Donagough's answer to it. They saw the "tray worth having," brought in by the intelligent-looking Richardson. They saw Mr. Foxcroft, the only individual left in the room besides themselves and the players, quietly lock both the doors, and then assume to himself the office of butler, which he performed with so much zealous gaiety that one flask of champagne was finished and another began before he attempted either to eat or drink anything himself. Neither did Mr. O'Donagough share largely in the conviviality of the moment. He professed himself to be quite out of heart from his infernal beating—swore that he had never met with any one so completely his master before, but declared that if he sat up all night and lost his last shilling he would not give in.

Mr. Ronaldson, whose head was not very capable of bearing steadily either his good fortune, or the good wine, was beginning to grow loquacious, when O'Donagough, per-

ceiving that the champagne had done all the work he wanted from it, at least for the present, brought back the attention of the young man to the business part of the entertainment by saying—

"Now Ronaldson! have at you again, double or quits, double the whole amount of my confounded losses, or quits. Do you agree?"

"To be sure I do," replied the young man with a jovial laugh. "What do you take me for?"

"For a very honest fellow, Ronaldson, who knowing he has got the advantage in play is willing to let his adversary take a chance from luck! Just put that tray back upon the other table, Foxcroft—we shall have no more whist to-night I dare say."

Foxcroft obeyed, and then placed himself, as before, behind Ronaldson, and precisely opposite to O'Donagough. It was then that Mrs. Stephenson, whose interest in the scene passing before her, was now worked up to a point that made her utterly forgetful of the awkwardness of her own situation—it was now for the first time that she began to comprehend fully the value, if not exactly the nature, of the telegraphic signs made by Mr. Foxcroft for the

benefit of Mr. O'Donagough. It was quite impossible, unless he had turned himself completely round, that Ronaldson could even be conscious of Mr. Foxcroft being near him, while on the other hand, not a glance of the eye, or a motion of the finger could escape being seen by O'Donagough, and that so distinctly, that the mere act of raising his eyes for an instant, was all that was required to obtain all the information which it was the purpose of Mr. Foxcroft to convey.

Mrs. Stephenson felt, as she said afterwards, that she would willingly have staked her own life, and almost that of one of her children, upon the issue of that game. Nor would there in truth have been any great risk in doing so. The event, as all must anticipate, was in favour of Mr. O'Donagough, who, as soon as it was ended said very composedly,—

"Well then, Ronaldson, now we start fair again. I have had a tremendous beating, nevertheless, nine games to three. However, I scorn to show a white feather! If I lose, my Devonshire estates must pay for it. If you will, I am ready to play you again for the same amount as I have now won, and I will tell you what I will do besides—for I can't endure the idea of

turning craven, merely because I have met with a better player than myself—I will go on with you for six games—just write it down Foxcroft—I will go on with you for six games, double or quits every time—and rather than let you count me a craven, I would go on for a dozen so, only I think we shall have had enough of it by that time, and the party will be broke up, and we shall all be ready to go to bed. Do you agree to it?"

Poor Ronaldson, who at the freshest hour of the morning would hardly have been capable of judging accurately of the nature and extent of the proposition now offered to him, was at this moment as utterly incapable of doing so as if his age had amounted to one lustre only, instead of five. With a laugh that was very nearly that of imbecility he rubbed his hands, and repeated again and again, "Done, done, done."

Another, and another game was then played, of course with the same result as the last. The young man's purse and well-stored pocket-book were by that time exhausted, upon which Foxcroft brought forth writing materials, and the half-sobered, half-stultified Ronaldson set his hand at the termination of the next

game to the acknowledgment of an enormous debt.

Mrs. Stephenson's position now became extremely painful. Though perfectly certain of the nefarious nature of the transaction that was going on before her eyes, she began as her embarrassment increased, and her spirits sunk, to doubt whether she would be able to prove it to others in such a manner as to exonerate the unfortunate young man from the effects of his folly. If not, she was conscious that in thus quietly looking on, and suffering their play to proceed, she was making herself a party to the poor victim's ruin. A moment's calculation sufficed to show her that the stake, if again doubled at the monstrous amount to which it had reached, would of itself constitute a large fortune, and this again had to be doubled, and the amount doubled yet again, before the match which she had heard agreed for could be finished. As to any change of fortune in the event of the games being played, she felt perfectly assured that it *could* not occur; and thus, if her fears as to the value of her own evidence were well grounded, she should be doomed, unless she summoned courage to interfere, to see a vast robbery com-

mitted, which it was most certainly, at the present moment, in her power to prevent.

So earnestly had her attention been fixed upon the events of the card-table, from the time of her entering the recess, that she had paid no attention to the sounds proceeding from the ball-room; but she now, as the fourth game of the match was rapidly progressing to its conclusion, listened attentively, and became convinced that though the music had not ceased, the company were departing. She heard many names called upon the stairs, a door to which stood open in the middle room, and thus at intervals permitted the sounds to reach her, despite the closed doors of the card-room. The idea that she might, if she lingered longer, outstay her own party, and cause them thereby the most serious alarm, as well as place herself and Miss Peters in a situation the most painfully embarrassing, sufficed to screw her courage to the fitting point, and as Mr. Ronaldson at the end of a deal said in a trembling voice, "I am forty-five to your ninety, O'Donagough, and the deal is yours,"—just as these boding words reached her ears, she started up, and, seizing her companion by the arm, drew her with her across

the room, overturning two chairs in her progress, and on reaching the door, the key of which readily obeyed her hand, she turned, and said in a voice much more distinct than she herself hoped for, "Play no more, young man! We have watched the game and know that you have been cheated. Throw down your cards and play no more. Your promissory note is not worth a farthing, for we can both witness to the manner in which it was won."

Mr. Ronaldson had sprung from his chair the moment the two ladies became visible, and standing aside to let them pass, stared, much after the manner he might have done had he seen a spectre. Mr. Foxcroft, who knew neither of the ladies by sight, flew to the door with some vague hope of preventing their going out, and whether he thought they might be subsequently pushed up the chimney, or thrown out of the window, he probably did not himself know at the moment; but whatever his projects might have been, they were rendered abortive by the door having yielded to the hand of Mrs. Stephenson before he reached it.

Mr. O'Donagough himself sat immoveable, nor would it have been easy to perceive from

his countenance that anything very remarkable had happened. The triumph of perceptibly shaking his philosophy remained for his old acquaintance Elizabeth Peters, who, recovering her courage the moment she saw the light streaming in upon them from the now fast-thinning rooms, forcibly drew back Mrs. Stephenson a step or two, and while several passers-by entered from curiosity, pronounced very distinctly as she fixed her eyes upon his face—

"I should like to know, sir, why it is that you go by a false name? Your name is Allen. At least, you were always called Major Allen at Clifton, and that you know, as well as I."

On hearing this, and on seeing the many eyes which were by this time fixed upon him, the bold spirit of the umquhile O'Donagough, now again Major Allen, was so far moved that he rose from his chair, and taking advantage of his accurate local knowledge, left the room by a side door which led to a back staircase, and was no more heard of that night.

Even the short moment occupied by these startling words of Miss Peters, was sufficient for the drawing together so many of the remaining guests around the door of the card-

room, that something like a crowd appeared to surround it as the two ladies, still pale and strongly agitated, passed through it. Their only object was now to find some member of their own party who might assist their retreat from the scene in which they had played so strange a part; but her first glance at the rooms made Mrs. Stephenson exclaim, "They are gone! Gracious heaven! What terror must Frederic be enduring on reaching home and not finding me!"

Great, indeed, was her delight, when she perceived General Hubert approaching with hasty steps towards the spot where many voices were already loudly discussing the adventure which nobody understood, but which everybody was endeavouring to explain.

"Thank heaven!" he exclaimed, eagerly receiving the hand which the trembling Nora stretched out to him. "What does all this mean? Where have you been concealed? We have been looking for you in every direction for above an hour. Frederic is just gone, for the second time, to see if you have reached home!"

"I have guessed it all! But for mercy's sake ask no questions now," replied Mrs. Ste-

phenson. "Take me away, dear General! Take us both away! we have both suffered together! We have been shut up looking on a horrid scene for hours. Yet now it is over, I am thankful that we had courage to act as we have done; but take us away, I implore you."

"If we go now, my dear Nora," replied the General, inexpressibly puzzled by her words, but convinced that it was no time to ask for explanation, "if we go now, Frederic will again miss you. Agnes is still in the other room—nothing could persuade her to leave the house till she was convinced that you were not in it. If you will sit down quietly with her for a few minutes, Stephenson will return, and I am sure it will be better for you both. Miss Peters does not look so deadly pale as you do, but I feel her arm trembling like your own."

While this was said, the General supported the two ladies, whose steps very unaffectedly faltered, across the room which divided the card-room from the principal drawing-room; but on reaching the door of it, instead of finding the quiet he had offered them, they were met by a scene which rendered anything like

tranquillity in the neighbourhood of it quite impossible. Standing in the middle of the room, was Mrs. O'Donagough with hands clasped, head-dress dishevelled, and her breast heaving with convulsive sobs. Beside her stood Miss Louisa Perkins, with a pocket-handkerchief at her eyes; while, with the exception of one silent group which occupied a sofa in a distant corner, every individual not making part of the crowd now in possession of the card-room, stood around her listening to her lamentations, and occasionally uttering a word or two of what seemed very unmeaning consolation.

"She is gone! She is eloped! Heaven only knows where, and for what! Where is her father? He has got his hands full, I dare say. But for mercy's sake let somebody go and bring Foxcroft to me—he shall go . . . . Oh! dear! Oh! dear! Where shall he go? Where shall I send him? I have no more idea than the child unborn! But I am sure and positive, as I stand here, that it is that horrid vile yellow man with the black whiskers that has taken her! Does anybody know such a person as Don Tornorino? or Tornapino? or some such name as that, wasn't it, Louisa? Dear dar-

ling, good-for-nothing creature as she is! I saw her waltzing away like one possessed with him, and when I asked her how he came to be here—for goodness knows I never asked him, she answered, dear, wicked, clever creature, in her own droll way, "Never you mind that, mama! Here he is, and that's enough! Oh dear! Oh dear! If he does not turn out to be a man of rank and fortune, I shall die and break my heart—I know I shall!"

Such were the sounds that from the crested pride

of the unfortunate Mrs. O'Donagough poured forth amidst a torrent of tears, and a whirlwind of sighs, interrupted at intervals, but not checked by the interjections of her hearers.

"How very distressing!"

"Poor woman! It is quite shocking!"

"I don't wonder at her being so terrified."

"I am sure if it was my child I should die on the spot."

Such and such-like were the only sounds which broke in upon the expression of her maternal anguish, till at length, while the unhappy lady paused for a moment to blow her nose, the gentle voice of Miss Louisa Perkins was heard to say, "Do you think, ma'am, that

there is any gentleman gone off with Matilda too?"

"Never mind whether there is or not!" replied the anxious mother. "What can that signify compared to my beautiful Patty? And such a fortune, too, as her poor dear father told me this very day that she would be sure of—Oh! it is too cruel of her!"

All this, and a great, a very great deal more in the same strain, was uttered by the bereaved lady, sometimes sitting, sometimes standing, and occasionally lying at full length upon a sofa, and ever with the much-enduring Louisa by her side, till at length every individual at all within hearing, became fully aware that Miss Patty O'Donagough had decidedly eloped with a black-whiskered Don, and that Miss Matilda Perkins had eloped too, but whether with her, or with anybody else, there appeared no evidence to show.

Nothing but the consciousness that her interference could do no good, kept Mrs. Hubert at a distance from her really very unhappy aunt during all these lamentations; but quite aware that she could render no assistance, and being in a state of very painful anxiety respecting the unaccountable disappearance of her

sister, she remained with Mr. and Mrs. Henderson, who were equally anxious with herself, silently waiting for the return of General Hubert, who had left them for the purpose of once more entering the empty supper-room, and once more inquiring of every servant in the hall if Mrs. Stephenson's equipage had been called.

Much too occupied by their own anxiety to remark the absence of their hostess, they were not aware that, for the last half hour, that unfortunate lady had been employed upon the unpleasing task of convincing herself, by various inquiries among her domestics, that her precious daughter had most certainly left the house without giving a hint to any one, of her intention of doing so. And as the black-whiskered Don (too well remembered as the first-floor lodger in ——— Street,) had also suddenly become invisible, it was but natural to suppose that he was her companion.

Great, indeed, was the joy of Agnes and her friend Mary, when their two sisters appeared after their mysterious retreat; and greater still was that of Mr. Stephenson, who returned in a few minutes afterwards, pale, vehemently agitated, and bringing the terrible intelligence

that no tidings could be heard of them. It was then that Mrs. Hubert, her spirits being relieved from her own great anxiety, felt desirous of uttering some word of kindness to her aunt, but this now seemed to be rendered impossible by the earnest conversation in which she was engaged with Mr. Foxcroft.

"No, no, Agnes!" said Mrs. Stephenson, as she heard her sister proposing to the General that they should, before they left the house, express some feeling of sympathy with poor Mrs. O'Donagough's alarm about her daughter, "No, Agnes, you must not speak to her now! It is not on account of her daughter's running away that she is looking as horror-struck and terrified as you see her at this moment. Poor soul! she has heard worse news than that! But where are Lady Stephenson and the Nivetts, and where is your dear girl?"

"All gone home, long ago, Nora," replied Mrs. Hubert.

"Then for pity's sake let us go too! This is no place for us to remain in! How kind you are to question me only with your eyes! But tired as I am, I am willing to tell you all our adventures before I sleep, if my poor frightened Frederic feels strength enough left

in him to drive to your house for an hour, before he retreats to his own."

The whole party were, in truth, much too anxious to hear all the mysteries of this strange evening explained to leave them any memory of their fatigue, and they all drove together to Berkeley Square, though five strokes from the General's repeater warned them that it was high time to go to rest. "But who," said Mrs. Henderson, "could rest till this most incomprehensible adventure is explained?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONCLUSION.

The breakfast in Berkeley Square was not an early one, but there were other causes for this, besides the lateness of the hour at which the General and his lady had retired to rest, for General Hubert, under all circumstances, was sure to be in his bath-room by eight o'clock. Neither was it the protracted slumbers of his lady which retarded the morning meal; for though on this occasion he certainly left her fast asleep,

> Her waking eyes had seen the light

long before the clock struck nine. But it sometimes happens that bed-rooms and dressing-rooms, are used for other purposes than sleeping and dressing.

The first object which greeted the eyes of Mrs. Hubert as she opened them, in consequence of her ears being invaded by a gentle sound near her pillow, was her daughter Elizabeth in her *robe de chambre*, with her beautiful hair all collected in one nymph-like roll at the back of her small but finely-proportioned head, and her fair face glowing with an expression of happiness too vivid to suffer drowsy sleep to exist before it.

"Will you forgive me, mama? You have been waked by a kiss. It is I who opened your shutters and drew your curtains."

"Is it late, dearest?" said Mrs. Hubert, rousing herself with the alertness of an alarmed conscience, fearful of having kept a hungry party waiting for breakfast. "Make the tea Elizabeth. Do not mind me—I shall be down very soon."

"But I don't want you to be down very soon, mama," replied Elizabeth, laughing, and blushing beautifully at the same time. "I want to speak to you first. Let me be your lady's maid to-day, may I?"

"Willingly, dear love!" said her mother, accepting an offered kiss; and shrewdly suspecting the subject of the offered conference,

she wrapped a dressing-gown round her, slipped her feet into her quilted satin slippers, and seating herself on the sofa at the bottom of the bed, said, "Now darling, sit down close beside me, and tell me all you have got to say."

"Not unless you will dress yourself, mama." And going to the proper receptacles of stockings and shoes, she found all that was needful, and held them with pretty obsequiousness to her mother's hand.

Mrs. Hubert looked up into the face of her daughter as she took them; but the fair conscious girl turned away from the speaking glance, with that true feminine shyness which

Would be wooed, and not unsought be won,

even to speak the words she had come expressly to utter.

There would have been something pretty to watch, in the struggle between this shyness, and the wish to disclose the secret that was bursting from her lips, but on such an occasion a mother's heart has no leisure for such speculations, and sympathizing with Elizabeth, though she could not quite be said to pity her, she threw her arm round her, and pressing her to her bosom, exclaimed—

"Seymour loves you, Elizabeth! and last night he told you so. Is it not this you would disclose to me?"

The only answer for a minute or two was a fond clinging return of the embrace, and a shower of happy tears shed on the maternal bosom.

"You guessed it then?" she said at length. "Ah mama! how cruelly we wronged him!"

"I thank heaven for it, Elizabeth," replied her mother, and he may well forgive a wrong which had its origin in such feelings as ours towards him."

"Oh yes! mama! he is quite aware of that. I do not believe he is at all inclined to complain of that or of anything else. Papa will be so kind as to see him this afternoon, will he not?"

"And why not this morning, Elizabeth?"

"I don't know, mama. Henry said the afternoon."

"I suppose he must have some business then," observed Mrs. Hubert, "for of course he must be very anxious to see your father."

"He *is* very anxious, my dear mother, and very anxious to see you too," replied Elizabeth, in a pleading tone. "Indeed, indeed, you

must never suspect him again of feeling anything that he ought not to feel."

From this point the conversation proceeded with about equal pleasure to both parties, and it was not till a multitude of pleasant things had been said and listened to, that Mrs. Hubert stopped the course of them by exclaiming, "I am very glad, Elizabeth, that this explanation took place between you last night! I should have felt more perfectly ashamed of our suspicions, I think, than I do now, if the first removal of them from your mind had been produced by an event of which you are still both ignorant, instead of by the much more agreeable mode of his confessing his affection for you."

"What event, mama?" demanded Elizabeth.

"Our unfortunate cousin Patty eloped last night from her father's house," replied Mrs. Hubert.

"Oh mother! Have I not reason to be glad that I had courage enough to go to the party last night? You know not—oh! you can never know how I dreaded it! But I thought it was right—I thought it was less weak, less indelicate than remaining at home to weep over

departed hopes, which I then thought I must have had no right to form. Had I yielded to this weakness, mother, might it not have been said, that he only proposed to me because he had lost her?"

"I don't know, my dear," replied her mother, laughing, "it is strange how much darkness may be dispelled by one little gleam of light. It now seems to me to have been so perfectly absurd in us all to imagine for a moment that Henry Seymour could be in love with Patty O'Donagough, that the idea no longer appears admissible. But what I might have thought without this gleam of light, I know not."

"I wish, mama," said Elizabeth, "that you would tell papa what has happened before I see him at breakfast. You are all but dressed now, may I send Claridge to tell him that you wish to see him in your dressing-room?"

"And why not tell him yourself, dearest?"

"Because I do not like to see him again till he knows all."

"Well then, send Claridge to him."

* * * * *

It was with feelings of happiness as pure and unmixed as those of her young daughter, that Mrs. Hubert communicated to her husband

the disclosure which had been made to her, but to her very great disappointment, he shook his head ominously as he listened to her.

"My dearest Hubert! Are you not pleased by this news?" said she, looking anxiously in his face. "I trust in heaven that you know nothing against this young man, for that our Elizabeth's happiness depends upon him is most certain."

"Agnes!" he replied, "I doubt if I have feelings of much stronger partiality towards my own sons, than I have felt towards Sir Henry Seymour. I have liked and loved the boy from childhood upwards, and though from a feeling of respect for Sir Edward I never uttered the opinion, I blamed much less than I sympathized with the feelings of the ardent young man when he rebelled against the authority which insisted upon his submitting to a routine of education for which he was not fitted. Therefore I freely allow that all the ill-behaviour of which we heard so much before he re-appeared from his self-banishment, has left no painful impression on my mind whatever. No, Agnes, it is what has happened since that has displeased me. As to the idea that Henry Seymour intended to marry our red cheeked

young cousin, I never entertained it for a moment, but that he has paid her a very unwarrantable degree of attention I do believe; and this, whether it proceeded from fun or fondness, is equally at variance with the character I should desire to find in the husband of Elizabeth."

"I should agree with you perfectly, Hubert, did I believe it. But what better authority have we for this unwarrantable degree of attention, than for Lord Mucklebury's history of the intended marriage. If you reject the one, I cannot understand how you can receive the other."

"Because in the one case I have no proof, nor ever had any, beyond vague report, while in the other I have the evidence of Sir Edward."

"On what occasion, Hubert?"

"The occasion to which I particularly allude occurred but yesterday. You know he was detained at St. James's till long after you left it, and in coming away he saw Sir Henry Seymour and Miss O'Donagough arm in arm and *tête-à-tête* at the bottom of the staircase, as no lady and gentleman could possibly be seen without drawing upon themselves a degree of

observation that Sir Henry Seymour ought to have been desirous to avoid."

"Believe me, Montagu, I can explain all that to you;" and Mrs. Hubert described with the most graphic truth Sir Henry's enforced surrender of herself and daughter in consequence of the manœuvering of Mrs. O'Donagough. "I confess," she added, "that at the time I *was* very angry with him, because it seemed to me that no man could feel himself obliged to yield such very civil acquiescence to any arrangement that did not accord with his inclination. But surely the declaration of last night is sufficient to convince us that it was no partiality of any kind for Miss O'Donagough which induced him to yield to my unfortunate aunt's attack upon him."

"After all that has passed between us on the subject, my dearest Agnes, you will not think me too completely a convert to the opinions of Aunt Betsy, if I confess to you that what I most object to in the business is Sir Henry Seymour's having any acquaintance at all with the O'Donagoughs or the Allens, or whatever their real names may be. The case was far different with us, dear love, when Mrs. Compton blamed us so severely for our

civilities to them at Brighton. In our case the alternative was a rude and almost cruel avoidance of a very near relation; but no such apology can be offered in the case of Seymour. In the highest paroxysm of her displeasure, Aunt Betsy never suspected either of us of seeking their society from preference. We, however, can by no possibility assign any other cause for the familiar intercourse which has unquestionably existed between them and Sir Henry. I have never encountered this wretch O'Donagough Allen anywhere without his alluding to Seymour's having recently dined with him. More than once I have questioned the young man, with as great an air of indifference as I could assume, to ascertain whether the statement were true or not; and though he certainly stammered, and coloured, and looked very heartily ashamed (which in my judgment by no means made the matter better), he never denied that it was true. I do not like this, Agnes. It shows a species of coarseness, or at best of indifference in the selection of acquaintance, which your Elizabeth, dearest, is as little likely to relish as her sweet mother."

Mrs. Hubert sighed deeply. There was too much apparent truth in these painful observa-

tions for her to attempt to reason them away, yet she felt that if they were to be the means of separating Sir Henry and Elizabeth, they would bring a degree of certain misery greatly disproportioned to their importance. As usual, her husband seemed to read her thoughts, for he added immediately, "Do not, however, fancy, my dear love, that I have any desire to separate these young hearts. It would be making poor Henry pay a heavier penalty for his folly than it deserves, but I think you will agree with me in advocating a longer period of probation and delay than would have been necessary had there been no such symptoms of levity. The adventures of last night, of all which he is probably still ignorant, will assist pretty effectually in opening his eyes to the character of his strangely chosen friends. Let not our dear girl have her feelings wounded by a single word of all this."

The breakfast, at which the young Emily and her good governess were present, passed off as such agitating meetings should always be permitted to do. A look, a smile, a silent kiss, said all that it was necessary to say, and when it was ended Elizabeth retired to her own room, astonished at her own composure, and capable

of enjoying without any drawback whatever, the dear delight of meditating for the first time with the privileged freedom of sanctioned love upon the unspeakable happiness that awaited her.

When General Hubert and his wife were again left alone, Elizabeth and Sir Henry were for a moment forgotten, while they discussed together the terrible discoveries of the previous night. The testimony of Mrs. Stephenson and Miss Peters was too clear to leave the slightest doubt respecting the character of the man with whom "the widow Barnaby" had connected herself, nor had they either of them any doubt that he was in truth the identical Major Allen who had

—— caused them both so great annoy,

nineteen long years ago at Clifton. It wanted, no warning voice from aunt Betsy to awaken the General to the necessity of separating himself and his family now and for ever, from all intercourse with so infamous a personage. But he half frightened the gentle Agnes, by telling her that he was expecting Frederic Stephenson to call upon him for the express purpose of paying a visit in Curzon Street.

"We mean to tell him," said the General, "that we recommend his immediately taking measures to leave the country, in order to avoid the dangers of a legal process which would be very likely to terminate in his being obliged to do so in a much less agreeable way."

"Would it not be better, Hubert, to leave him to his own devices?" said his wife.

"No, Agnes; not in this country at least. He cannot be permitted to remain here after the double discovery of last night. Frederic is extremely anxious that he should be off immediately, for as long as he remains in the country, he will be living in dread of his wife's being called into a court of justice, to give evidence of the fraud of which she was a witness. Miss Peters too will live under the same terror, and indeed, Agnes, I think it desirable for all our sakes, that he should leave England as early, and as quietly as possible."

"You cannot doubt my being of the same opinion, Montagu," replied Mrs. Hubert. "I only dreaded for you the extremely disagreeable operation of telling him so."

"Fear not for that, Agnes. The visit will be a very short one, depend upon it. Besides the real motive, we have the ostensible one,

you know, of inquiring if they have received any news of Miss O'Donagough."

Mr. Stephenson was punctual to his appointment, and the two gentlemen set out together for Curzon Street. To the question, "Is Mr. O'Donagough at home?" the answer given was, "No, sir," short and decided.

"Is Mrs. O'Donagough at home?"

"I don't know, sir," was the hesitating reply.

"Be so good as to tell her that a gentleman wishes to see her on very particular business."

"Please to walk in, sir," said the small and incautious page, opening the dining-room door for them, and then galloping up the stairs.

"We had better follow him, Frederic, or the affair will be endless," suggested the General.

"I agree with you," answered his companion, and before the little page had half delivered his message, General Hubert and Mr. Stephenson were in the room.

The business which had brought them there was more likely to arrive at a speedy conclusion than they had hoped for, when they entered it, for greatly to their surprise they found assembled in the second drawing-room, a group consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Allen

O'Donagough, their daughter, the yellow gentleman with black moustache and whiskers, and the two faithful Perkinses besides.

"I will not apologize for disturbing you, Major Allen," said General Hubert advancing, "though I did not expect to find you here when I entered. The business which brings us here is yours, and not our own, and cannot, as I think you will allow, be considered as an intrusion. But it may perhaps be more agreeable to you to converse with us in another room?"

Major Allen measured his two visitors with his eye, and then threw a glance towards the Don; but whatever his first thoughts might have been, his second, which are proverbially the best, induced him to rise from his chair, and with a very dignified demeanour to marshal General Hubert and Mr. Stephenson into the next room, the eventful scene of the last night's misadventures. Nay, he even moved his hand in token that they might be seated; but this hospitable notification did not appear to be noticed, for neither gentleman accepted it.

"My business with you, sir," said the General, "need not detain us long. A very

disagreeable accident made a lady, for whom both this gentleman and myself are nearly interested, the witness to a most nefarious transaction in which you were the principal agent. It has also come to our knowledge that you are the same person, who many years since at Clifton were implicated under the appellation of Major Allen in a transaction which, if I mistake not, caused you to be sent out of the country. Perhaps, sir, as a citizen, I should be doing my duty better by mentioning these facts to a police magistrate; but I wish, from motives purely selfish, I confess, that you should now leave England by your own act, instead of that of the legislature. But this, if done at all, must be done promptly. A very short time will probably render it too late. Are you ready, sir, to give me an assurance that you will depart immediately? If not, or if hereafter, I should find such assurance falsified, I shall feel myself obliged, however, reluctantly, to obtain the same object by a process that will not depend upon yourself."

Major Allen was, as usual, exceedingly well dressed, and his wig, greatly relaxed in its wavy outline since he made his first re-appearance at Brighton, was a perfect model for

the head of a middle aged man of fashion. Though his visitors stood, he had seated himself in a deep arm chair, and assumed the attitude rather of one who was passing judgment, than receiving it. During the greater part of General Hubert's address to him, his countenance might have been studied in vain for any expression indicative of what was passing within, but at its conclusion a mocking smile took possession of his features, and looking at each gentleman steadily in the face for a minute or two, he said—

"I am really too happy in finding that my nearest connexions and myself agree so entirely respecting the little experiment in steam navigation for which I am preparing. Pray sir, (to General Hubert,) remember me very affectionately to my charming niece Agnes, and believe me to be your very obedient humble servant, John William Patrick Allen O'Donagough." A strong emphasis was laid upon the last word, for the purpose, probably of making his auditors understand that he was aware of, and appreciated, the privilege by which every man has a right to designate himself by any appellation which he may choose to select.

Having uttered this speech, he permitted

himself the audacious gratification of another steady stare at them both, and then, rising with an air of great *hauteur* and deliberation, stalked through his favourite side door, and closed it after him.

Convinced that the business upon which they came was satisfactorily executed, the two gentlemen were too well pleased by knowing that it was over, to feel any inclination to quarrel with the manner of their reception. After a moment's consultation, they agreed that it would be better to visit the unfortunate Mrs. Allen O'Donagough, for whom they felt much compassion, a civil "good morning," and therefore prepared to make their retreat by passing through the room by which they had entered.

No symptom however of any feelings which called for compassion, seemed to exist amidst the party they once more came upon. Mrs. Allen O'Donagough was lying at full length upon a sofa, squeezed in at the foot of which, perched Miss Louisa Perkins. In full view of the well-pleased maternal eye, upon another sofa, sat the yellow gentleman, and Patty extremely close beside him, her arm lovingly thrown around his neck, while the fair Matilda,

with eyes full of very melancholy tenderness, and her tall figure sustaining itself against the mantle-piece, stood watching them.

General Hubert was about to utter something like a friendly farewell, but Mrs. Allen O'Donagough gave him no time for it.

"You are making us an early wedding-visit, I must say, gentlemen,—but it is all very right and proper between near relations. Give me leave to introduce to you my married daughter, Madame Espartero Christinino Salvator Mundi Tornorino." These names she read from a paper ingeniously attached by a couple of pins to a cushion of the sofa that was exactly within reach of her eye. "You see, General, I have had the good fortune to marry my daughter, before you have married yours—and to a man of extremely high rank too. Permit me to present to you ———, I beg pardon, permit me to present *you* to Don Espartero Christinino Salvator Mundi Tornorino, my son-in-law. Neither you, nor Frederic Stephenson have any title, you know, and therefore it is, of course, proper that you should be presented to him, and not he to you. I am sure I heartily hope that my great niece Elizabeth may do as well. But, by the bye, General, I think it is but fair

to give you a hint about that young scamp, Henry Seymour. It's no thanks to him if my daughter *is* married to a man of title and quality—it would have been all the same if his false-heartedness had driven her to marry a mere nobody, which with my high spirit and exalted feelings would certainly have broke my heart. But it is not only his abominable falseness in love-making that I think it right to mention—I wish also to let you know that there is a secret which he has taken the greatest of all possible care should never come to any of your ears. You none of you guess, I believe, that the young scapegrace was off to Australia when his penitent fool of a guardian thought he had shut himself up somewhere, all in the dumps, because of their quarrel? When we were good friends together, he told us all about it, and if he had behaved as he ought to have done, I would never have said a word to anybody on the subject—but he *has* provoked me, I won't deny it."

"How did you find out he had been to Australia, Mrs. O'Donagough?" demanded the General. "Did you get acquainted with him there?"

"No, not I, General—but I know it just as

well as if I had, for we all came to England in the same ship."

"And it was then that you became acquainted with him?"

"Yes, to be sure it was."

"Now then, madam," said the well-contented General Hubert, "we will wish you good morning," and with a slight bow to the whole party, the two gentlemen turned to leave the room.

"I say!" cried Madame Espartero Christinino Salvator Mundi Tornorino, calling after them, "Don't you forget to tell my cousin Elizabeth, what a famous lark I have had. She must be sure to come and pay me a wedding visit."

* * * * *

On returning to Berkeley Square, General Hubert found his wife and daughter very anxiously gazing upon the outside of a large packet which had been just left at the door by the servant of Sir Henry Seymour. Rightly guessing that it contained a confession of the exploit of which he had just learnt the particulars from Mrs. O'Donagough, he fearlessly opened it in their presence. It contained more than one sheet of closely written paper, and

detailed at length, and with very amiable penitence, the history of his escapade, the rebellious feelings which had led to it, the very unpleasant acquaintance that it had entailed upon him, and lastly, with all the eloquence of deep feeling, it explained how his ardent love for the General's lovely daughter had rendered galling the idea of appearing more wild and ill-conducted in the eyes of her family than he had yet done, and induced him to endure the martyrdom of propitiating the good will of Mr. O'Donagough in order to secure his secrecy.

"Then Sir Henry, it seems, has not taken more pleasure in the acquaintance than ourselves, General Hubert;" said Agnes with a very happy smile.

"Thank heaven that I know it!" he replied joyously. "And now, my sweet Elizabeth," he added, fondly embracing his blushing daughter, "I can tell you with a safe conscience that I know not another, to whom I could resign the charge of making you happy, with so firm a conviction that the precious trust would be executed faithfully."

Who needs be told that the young Elizabeth's bridal was a gay one? When it was known as a certainty that the Allen O'Dona-

gough family, together with their illustrious son-in-law, were actually departed for the United States, Mrs. Hubert ventured to write a full, true, and particular account of all their recent adventures to her aunt, Mrs. Elizabeth Compton; announcing at the same that her company was earnestly entreated at the approaching wedding, and assuring her that she should meet there no nieces but such as she had too long honoured with her love, for them to feel any doubts as to her pleasure at a reunion.

The delight of the still active old lady on receiving this letter was great indeed. She could not have died happy, and she knew it, so long as "the Barnaby" was an inhabitant of the same land as the Huberts. A dread of mischief and disgrace arising from the incongruous connexion perpetually haunted her, and in so serious a shape as very materially to disturb her tranquillity. But she now felt that the danger was over for ever, and immediately wrote an acceptance of the joyous invitation, in a tone of heartfelt happiness that caused tears of pleasure to dim for a moment the beautiful eyes of the bride elect.

Of all the guests assembled at those splendid

nuptials, there was not one, perhaps, who excited so universal a degree of interest as herself—all sought to do the venerable and animated old lady honour, and no one could receive their honours more gaily, or more gracefully, giving throughout the whole day but one slight indication that she still could be a little mischievous, if she chose it, and that was by whispering in the General's ear, when Emily was assisting in distributing the wedding-cake after breakfast, "Do you mean to send any wedding-cake across the Atlantic, dear General?"

THE END.

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